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Russia

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions remained largely the same for most religious groups, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies, such as the Federal Registration Service (FRS), and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of a few religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (the 1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage some religious groups considered nontraditional. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), treated the leadership of some Islamic groups as security threats.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens, but there were some problems between majority and minority groups. Prejudices against non-Orthodox religions were behind manifestations of anti-Semitism and occasional friction with non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Because xenophobia, racism, and religious bigotry are often intertwined, it was often difficult to discern the particular motivation for discrimination against members of religious groups. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occasionally disseminated negative publications and held protest meetings against religions considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of non-Orthodox Christian denominations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly supported the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and Consulates maintained a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings to discuss the U.S. Government's concerns. Embassy officers looked into possible violations of religious freedom and discussed visa issues affecting religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials. Other Department of State and U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142 million. In practice, only a minority of citizens actively participated in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a religious group participated in religious life rarely or not at all. There is no one set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the statistics below are compiled from government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens are Russian Orthodox. Muslims, with a population estimated between 14 million and 23 million, form the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. There are an estimated one million Buddhists, the majority of whom live in the traditionally Buddhist regions of Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. According to the NGO Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants make up the second largest group of Christian believers, with 3,500 registered organizations and more than 2 million followers. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. There are an estimated 250,000 Jews, the majority of whom live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside other religions.

According to the annual report from the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Ministry of Justice had registered 21,963 religious organizations as of January 1, 2008, 993 fewer than January 2006. The registered religious groups (with the number of registered organizations) include Russian Orthodox (12,586), Muslim (3,815), Protestant (several

denominations totaling 3,410), Jehovah's Witnesses (402), Jewish (286), Orthodox Old Believers (283), Roman Catholic (240), Buddhist (200), and other denominations.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups, most often through the registration process. The Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The 1997 Law declares all religions equal before the law, prohibits government interference in religion, and establishes simple registration procedures for religious groups. The country is by law a secular state without a state religion. The preamble to the 1997 Law, however, acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage and also recognized the "special contribution" of Orthodoxy to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

The Government observes Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday.

There is a universal military draft for men, but the Constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience. The length of alternative service is longer than standard military service. The standard length of military service is 12 months, alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 18 months, and alternative service in a nondefense agency is 24 months. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions. Students of religious training institutions are not eligible for education deferrals from military service.

The 1997 Law creates three categories of religious communities (groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations) with different levels of legal status and privileges.

The most basic unit is a "religious group," which has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. A group is not registered with the Government and consequently does not have the legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle, groups are thus able to rent public spaces and hold services, but in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

A "local religious organization" can be registered if it has at least 10 citizen members and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. Local religious organizations have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

"Centralized religious organizations" can be registered by combining at least three local organizations of the same denomination. In addition to all the legal rights enjoyed by local organizations, centralized organizations also have the right to open new local organizations without any waiting period. Centralized organizations that have existed in the country for more than fifty years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Following the passage of the law, groups that failed to re-register by December 31, 2000, became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status.

The 2006 Law on Public Associations (NGO Law) contains some provisions that apply to religious organizations. The April 2007 amendments to the NGO law simplified and eased the requirements for religious organizations. Although each organization must still supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body, they no longer have to provide details of religious congresses, conferences, or governing body meetings, including the number of participants. The accounting procedures have been significantly simplified.

The NGO Law grants the Ministry of Justice the authority to obtain certain documents, send its representatives (with advance notice) to attend religious organization events, and conduct an annual review of the organization's compliance with its mission statement on file with the Government. Religious organizations are required to inform the Ministry of Justice of changes in leadership or address within 3 days of the changes taking effect. The required reporting includes information about "organized events and activities" and accounts of funds received from international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, and stateless persons. The NGO Law contains extensive annual reporting requirements. Small organizations especially complained about the time and effort needed to fulfill them, and denominations with many local organizations noted that compliance with these provisions for each local

organization is highly burdensome. The law allows the Government to file suit against organizations that fail to comply with the law's requirements, and if a court finds in favor of the Government, the organization may be closed down.

While neither the Constitution nor the 1997 Law accord explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions, in practice the ROC cooperates more closely with the Government than do other religious groups. The ROC has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various government ministries that give the ROC greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, and the military. ROC activities with the Government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, the holding of religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat extremism.

The ROC has special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received preferential treatment.

Officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include some Protestant and newer religious movements.

The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, last updated in 2000, states that "ensuring national security includes countering the negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missionaries."

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they may not conduct services or other religious activities until they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

In November 2007 the Moscow City Duma (legislature) removed "religious proselytizing in public" from its list of administrative offences in the new Moscow City Code.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan have laws banning extremist Islamic "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. The former president of the Kabardino-Balkaria republic ordered the closure of six of seven mosques in Nalchik, the region's capital, in 2004. One was reopened in 2007, while the others remained closed and were suffering from disrepair and vandalism.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and monitor application of the 1997 Law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations, headed by the Minister of Culture and Mass Communications.

There are avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include suboffices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations. Religious minorities most often encounter problems at the regional level.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 Law. The Academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

The Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman contains a department for religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints. *The Ombudsman's Office receives 200-250 religious freedom complaints every year, many of which allege multiple individual violations. The Office estimated that approximately 75 percent of these complaints represent genuine violations of religious freedom rights guaranteed under the law.*

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, were used by some regional officials to restrict the activities of religious minorities. According to many observers, local governments are more susceptible to pressure from the local religious majority and therefore are more likely to discriminate against local minority religious communities. Many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal Government intervenes in local cases, it works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts. The federal Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The federal Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public use of school

buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Several regions offer a course on Orthodox Christianity in public schools, and five oblasts or regions (Kaluga, Tver, Bryansk, Smolensk, and Voronezh) have a mandatory class on the "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture." Students may avoid the Belgorod Oblast voluntary course only if their parents provide and pay for an alternative course. The course is offered as an elective in several other regions. In regions where the class is not mandatory, in practice students may be compelled to take it where schools do not provide alternatives.

Some regions offer a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that the Minister of Education had suggested but did not introduce nationally. Although the Ministry of Education rejected continued publication and dissemination of a controversial textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, some schools continued to use the text. The textbook contained descriptions of some religious groups that members of those groups found objectionable. The Congress of Religious Associations in the Tyumen region appealed to the Governor and regional department of education to allow input from other religious groups into the religious culture curriculum, claiming that the course currently contains only the viewpoint of the ROC.

The 2002 Law on Extremism, amended in July 2006, can affect religious groups, particularly Muslim groups, by criminalizing a broad spectrum of speech and activities.

The 2006 amendments allow some charges of extremism where persons are alleged to have defended or expressed sympathy with other individuals already charged with extremism.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government selectively enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fall into four categories: registration of religious organizations, access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits), visas for foreign religious personnel, and government harassment of religious organizations or individuals. In the first three cases, religious communities rely upon government officials to grant them permission to assemble, own or build property, or allow persons into the country. While the individual cases are too numerous to mention, several examples in each category are detailed below.

Following the 1997 Law's registration deadline of December 31, 2001, the Ministry of Justice began to legally dissolve approximately two thousand organizations that had not re-registered, sometimes over the complaints of groups who claimed that they were still active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution decreased as this wave of dissolutions has passed, and only a few were still being contested in court.

Many of the difficulties that religious communities face are rooted in bureaucratic obstacles and corruption, not religious bigotry. While it is nearly impossible to discern if groups are being targeted because of their religious beliefs or because they are vulnerable to demands by corrupt officials, the effect is a restriction on their ability to worship freely. In many cases, the problem lies not in the veracity of the government's charges, but in their uneven application by region and by religion.

Due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register. Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. Others operated without registering with the Government, meeting in members' homes.

Dissolutions of existing organizations varied greatly by region. For example, in Tyumen Oblast alone in 2007, the FRS requested the closure of 25 Muslim, several Protestant, 1 Russian Orthodox, and 1 Roman Catholic organization for failing to comply with reporting requirements. In the Republic of Chuvashiya, the FRS requested the dissolution of 11 religious organizations and issued warnings of noncompliance to 28 organizations. In Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, the FRS warned 55 religious organizations for noncompliance violations such as missing reporting deadlines, acting outside their own charters, and using their property for purposes other than those officially authorized.

The Urals Branch of the International Religious Freedom Association reported difficulties in registering Protestant organizations in the Ural region. In Chelyabinsk Oblast, Pentecostals were able to register only 6 of more than 30 organizations, and Seventy-day Adventists were able to register only 3 of twenty-five organizations active in the Oblast.

Protestant organizations also faced difficulties in renting premises throughout the Ural region, especially in Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk Oblasts. The Seventh-day Adventists were refused premises to hold Christmas services in Yekaterinburg, and their contracts for renting offices were terminated five times in Krasnoturyinsk, a town in Sverdlovsk Oblast. In December 2007 in the Argaysh district, Chelyabinsk Oblast, the services of Adventists were terminated and raided by the police and district officials. The officials made a list of the members of the religious group, some of whom later faced persecution at their work places. One woman was reportedly forced to retire under pressure from her colleagues.

On July 12, 2007, St. Petersburg City Court ruled to dissolve the St. Petersburg Scientology Center. The Court found that the center had violated its NGO registration by engaging in educational and religious activities. On November 20, 2007, the Russian Supreme Court upheld the St. Petersburg court decision.

In January 2008 prosecutors in Bashkortostan filed a criminal case against the Scientologists (officially registered as an NGO, "Center of Dianetics"), accusing them of selling medications and vitamins to the population in doses that exceeded permissible concentrations and of offering classes and instruction without a license.

Some religious schools were liquidated after they had operated for years without proper licenses to conduct education programs. Educational establishments closed by courts in 2007 for this reason included a madrassah affiliated with the Mordovia Muslim Spiritual Authority, a branch of the Saifulla Kadi Islamic University in Dagestan, and a Biblical Center of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals) in the Republic of Chuvashiya.

As of December 2007 the Government had registered 402 Jehovah's Witnesses local organizations in 72 regions, but problems with registration in Moscow continued since the organization's 2004 ban by Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court and the Moscow City Court (of appeal). The Moscow community appealed the ban to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and was still waiting for the case to be heard at the end of the reporting period. The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

In July 2007 the ECHR unanimously ruled against the Government in a case brought by the Christ's Grace Church of Evangelical Christians in Chekhov. In September 2002 the Chekhov town council had refused permission for the church to hold a public outdoor service. The town court upheld the order, stating that since "the Church of Evangelical Christians practices a religion that is different from the religion professed by the majority of the local residents," a public religious service could cause discontent among the twenty other religious organizations in the town and threaten public order. The ECHR ruled that Russia had violated the church members' religious freedom and ordered the Government to pay the church \$9,000 (€6,000).

In *Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army v. Russia*, the ECHR ruled in October 2006 that the Government's refusal to re-register the Moscow branch of the organization violated the right of assembly and freedom of religion of the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army's application to re-register its Moscow Branch with the Moscow Justice Department remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

In September 2007 the ECHR published the final judgment on the case of *Church of Scientology Moscow v. Russia* in which the court ruled that Moscow authorities violated the religious freedom rights of the Church of Scientology under the European Convention on Human Rights by persistently refusing to re-register its Moscow church. The Government paid the fine stipulated by the ECHR, but the Moscow branch of the FRS continues to refuse to re-register the Church of Scientology Moscow as a religious organization. On March 21, 2008, approximately two hundred members of the government-sponsored "Young Russia" youth group staged a protest led by State Duma member Maksim Mishenko against "American totalitarian sects." In April 2008 the Scientologists' Moscow landlord refused to renew their lease and asked them to vacate the building. In June 2008 the Church of Scientology opened a new center in the northern outskirts of Moscow.

Cases from other Church of Scientology branches remain pending at the ECHR. Local authorities refused to register Scientology centers as religious organizations in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not been in existence for 15 years, they are by law ineligible to register as religious organizations and cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars). The Churches of Scientology in Surgut City and Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan) filed suits with the ECHR contesting the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the 15-year rule. Despite these difficulties, the Church of Scientology increased the number of groups operating in the country from 45 in April 2007 to 59 in April 2008.

According to FRS statistics, there are 21,963 registered religious groups operating in the country, approximately half of which are affiliated with the ROC. In 2005, the last year for which statistics are available, authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations. The Ministry of Justice sent notifications of violations to 2,996 religious organizations. The courts made decisions to liquidate 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship. Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities.

In the greater Moscow region, Muslim groups complained that they have been limited to only four official mosques that were established years ago. In a November 2007 open letter to Moscow Regional Governor Boris Gromov, the Russian Council of Muftis stated that there are 13 other cities in the region where the local Muslim community has been unable to receive a permit to construct a mosque.

Many nontraditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship. Because they were small and often newly established, they typically lacked the necessary resources to buy or rent facilities on the open market and must rely on government assistance. Because they are nontraditional, they frequently met opposition from the traditional communities and often were unable to find government officials who were willing to assist them in renting state-owned property. There were multiple reports of religious organizations who were not allowed to renew leases on public or private buildings. Increased competition for space in a growing economy and increasing real estate prices led many owners (public and private) to lease property to higher paying

tenants, and in some cases, religious groups were refused outright at any price. Representatives of numerous Protestant groups spoke about increasing difficulty in extending existing leases or signing new leases for worship premises, the majority of which are still state-controlled. Some religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, but also the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostal congregations, and the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, reported that local authorities in recent years denied them permission to acquire land on which to construct places of worship. Authorities continued to deny construction permits to several groups.

The Word of Life Christian Church in Kaluga region continued to face great difficulties trying to build its church. In June 2007 a court ruled in favor of the church and invalidated the Kaluga's mayoral decree to confiscate the church's property. In October 2007 the court denied the city's appeal. Local authorities, however, continued to harass the church. On July 4, 2007, the police seized a computer and documents, reportedly to find information on the church's secondary school. After seizing a list of the church's members, the police called the members and summoned them to the prosecutor's office for questioning about the school.

The Sochi mayor's office continued to deny the Muslim community authorization to build a new mosque; the current premises are inadequate to accommodate the membership. Officials allotted land several times but never transferred it to the Muslim community. According to the regional government, authorities can allocate land for a mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location would not cause conflict.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting under the influence of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

The Suzdal Diocese Office of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) confirmed that 15 churches--all in the Suzdal District of Vladimir Oblast--were taken away from the ROAC and transferred to the ROC. In Zheleznovodsk, congregation members built a new ROAC church after losing their former place of worship to the city administration; however, they later were deprived of their new church by city officials, and now had to gather for worship in a private house.

Richen Ling, a Tibetan Buddhist community, continued to rent facilities since it has been unable to secure a permanent house of worship after it lost its Moscow city center premises in 2004 due to a municipal construction project.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. The authorities would not allow the church building to be occupied until an annex illegally built by the former owner was legalized. The church estimated that the building would remain closed for 2 years until all the necessary documentation was completed.

Local officials have refused permission to build to a Catholic parish in Barnaul (Altai Region) and to a Muslim community in Sochi for more than 10 years.

In May 2007 the Russian Supreme Court temporarily suspended the January 2006 Astrakhan district court decision for the demolition of a mosque. At the end of the reporting period, the mosque remained intact and its worshippers continued to wait for a decision on their appeal to the ECHR. The construction of the mosque had been allowed by the Astrakhan mayor in 1998, but officials argued in 2006 that the land was zoned residential, that the mosque was illegally built, and that the community must demolish it. Subsequently, the community submitted a rejected appeal to the Supreme Court, which upheld the demolition order and held that the Muslim community must pay for the demolition itself.

The Emmanuel Pentecostal Church continued to face difficulties building its church in Moscow. The old House of Culture, which the Emmanuel Church wants to convert into a prayer house and office building, sits on land that the local land committee agreed to rent to the church. Other local authorities opposed to that location for the church have held up registration of the land title, some on grounds that local public opinion was against the religious community. They refused to allow the building to be reconstructed as a church. On March 26, 2007, arsonists set the building on fire.

After the 1997 Law changed the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, nontraditional religious groups reported problems receiving long-term visas. In October 2007 the Government introduced new visa rules that allow foreigners (including religious workers) with business or humanitarian visas to spend only 90 of every 180 days in the country. According to religious experts, these rules were not aimed at religious workers, but the effect has been to severely restrict religious groups that rely upon foreign religious workers. The Roman Catholic Church, which relies almost exclusively on priests from outside the country, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with more than four hundred foreign missionaries, have been particularly hard hit by this provision. While foreign religious workers seem able to acquire visas with few problems, the 90-day limit on their stay in the country limits their ability to work and significantly increases their expenses. Although registered religious organizations have the option to sponsor foreign workers and missionaries on work visas (which do not have 90-day or 180-day limits), this is a complicated process that places significant financial and administrative burdens on the organizations.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era and acquire new property. The Moscow-based SOVA Center said the property restitution problem was most prevalent among Muslim and Protestant

groups.

Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religious groups continued to pursue restitution cases. In October 2007 a new federal law came into effect which specified the conditions and procedures for transferring ownership of state-owned land. The law allows religious organizations to retain their current land plots for unlimited use until January 1, 2010.

The ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims, including claims to thirty properties in Moscow alone. At the end of the reporting period, the Moscow Diocese of the ROC owned more than 1,400 buildings, up from 130 in 1998.

Property claims by the ROC are legally complicated, since there was no separation of church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox Church buildings that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property before 1917. The ROC was only entitled to use these buildings and theoretically could have been evicted, but there was no attempt to do so. The ROC fully owned only churches built, bought, or received after 1991.

The Roman Catholic community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property was returned, the community had no success with buildings that had been privatized. The community continued to work with authorities at the federal and local levels to resolve these issues.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported that federal officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, as had some regional officials, although some Jewish groups asserted that the Government had returned only a small portion of the total properties confiscated during the Soviet period. The international Chabad Lubavitch organization repeatedly sought return of the Schneerson Collection, a large collection of revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes, which the authorities consider part of the country's cultural heritage.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and of giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, and others. There were credible reports that individuals within the federal security services and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts with those groups. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the Ministry of Justice to reject registration applications.

On June 10, 2008, the Supreme Court overturned a March 2008 decision by a Smolensk court to dissolve a local Methodist church for operating a Sunday school without a license. Local government authorities, including the regional procurator, the police, and the Education Department, had investigated the local Methodist church at the request of the ROC Bishop of Vyazma. The bishop reportedly asked the procurator to "take the measures necessary in this situation to defend the inhabitants of our city, particularly youth, from this pseudo-religious organization."

In February 2008 the Belgorod regional court dissolved a Methodist organization for failing to file an annual report with the Government. The church may continue to meet, but only at premises provided by a member. Government officials noted that they had received no response to two official warnings sent to the congregation. The court reportedly did not attempt to determine if the church was actually operating, contrary to national guidance from the Constitutional Court.

Four times a year, the Government updates a list of banned extremist publications. Those who publish or distribute the texts face a four-year prison term. The current list includes Islamic religious texts, a series of neo-pagan materials intolerant of other religions (Christianity in particular), and several texts that were explicitly racist or anti-Semitic. In February 2008 the Government added the widely read *The Personality of a Muslim*, a moderate and pacifist work by Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi. The Chairman of the Council of Muftis, Ravil Gaynutdin, condemned the ban as a violation of the freedom of religious belief. In February 2008 a lawyer from Izhevsk filed a complaint with the ECHR protesting the ban on the Islamic religious books.

In May 2008 charges were initiated against Aslambek Ezhayev, the Director of the Islamic publishing house "Umma" and head of the Publishing Department of the Moscow Islamic University, who was charged with inciting religious hatred for publishing *The Personality of a Muslim*.

In October 2007 the Prosecutor General began a large-scale investigation into Tartar-Turkish schools in Tatarstan that were linked to the teachings of Said Nursi, a 20th century pacifist Turkish Islamic theologian. In December 2007, officials from the FSB searched homes in Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk, Novosibirsk, Makhachkala, and other cities for materials by Nursi, including in the apartment of Marat Tamimdarov, who has translated some of Nursi's works into Russian.

Authorities in St. Petersburg apparently suspended their investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses national headquarters for alleged violations of the NGO law.

On February 7, 2008, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Asbest, a small town in Sverdlovsk Oblast, was raided by the police and the Federal Investigation Bureau who inspected the premises and seized literature for further examination. In June, the prosecutor petitioned the Asbest City Court to rule that the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications *Watchtower*, *Awake!* and *Draw Close to Jehovah* were extremist and filed criminal charges against the leaders of the local Jehovah's Witnesses organization. The prosecutor published a statement that read in part, "It was established that members of this organization carried out agitation among the inhabitants of Asbest and distributed magazines, brochures, and books containing information aimed at the inciting of enmity, the promotion of exclusivity, and the abasement of human dignity on the basis of religious orientation. Statements by this religious organization contained in the print editions that have been distributed by it incite persons to adopt a harsh view of other religions."

The Government permitted Orthodox chaplains and priests wide access to military bases. Protestant groups were more limited in such access. The military has Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and Jewish chaplains. Authorities largely banned Islamic services in the military and generally did not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some recruits serving in the army reported that fellow servicemen insulted and abused them because they were Muslim.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although there are several laws addressing crimes motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, law enforcement agencies enforced these laws in an inconsistent, generally infrequent, and sometimes arbitrary manner.

Authorities rarely prosecuted or sentenced those arrested for attacks and vandalism against religious minorities, and they often failed to bring hate-crime charges even when religious bigotry was clearly involved. Some government officials denied that there was a problem with hate crimes, or if they did exist, they were manifestations of economic ills. Some government officials and human rights observers noted that, due to heavy caseloads, prosecutors chose to file easily proven charges of vandalism or hooliganism rather than risk an acquittal on the harder-to-prove hate-crime motive. The result was that hate crime legislation was often not enforced.

The Government used counter-terrorism methods to commit serious violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were numerous cases of Muslims being prosecuted for extremism or terrorism even when they had no clear connection to such activities. These included individuals detained for possessing religious literature such as the Qur'an or on the basis of evidence allegedly planted by the police. Some persons suspected by local police of Islamic extremism allegedly were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

According to human rights groups, a February 2003 Supreme Court decision to ban 15 Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to arbitrarily detain Muslims for alleged connections to these groups.

In May 2007, during an interethnic brawl in Stavropol between hundreds of Russian and Chechen youths, Gelani Ayatev was badly beaten and soon after died of his injuries. Zaurbek Akhmadov, an eyewitness, said that riot troops and local police cheered on skinheads as they physically assaulted Ayatev, who had been handcuffed. Police then put Ayatev, still in handcuffs, and Akhmadov, who had been shot in the leg by police as he tried to help Ayatev, in the back of a police vehicle. According to Akhmadov, the police refused to allow medical attention for Ayatev or Akhmadov for more than an hour, and in response to Akhmadov's cries to help Ayatev and bring him to a doctor, a policeman answered "Don't worry. He won't be shouting Allah Akbar anymore."

On March 31, 2006, residents of Novaya Adygeia village were prevented from going to their mosque for Friday prayers. Police and Adygeia militia blocked all the roads into the village, stopped cars, and searched Muslims. According to the Maykop mosque imam, police officers also allegedly assaulted and apprehended a group of young Muslims and the imam; masked policemen dragged the group to minibuses and took them to the Interior Ministry's Anti-Organized Crime Department. The policemen beat and questioned them about why they wore beards and observed Islamic norms of hygiene. After the Muslims were detained for a night in prison, officials took them before a judge who ordered their immediate release. The NGOs Memorial and SOVA Center reported that government officials have harassed Muslims in Adygeia since 2005, including seizing religious literature, preventing congregants from attending Friday prayers, and warning them to stop attending the mosque.

There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals who were publicly discussing their religious views, but authorities usually resolved these instances quickly.

On May 13 and 14, 2007, police arrested and detained 15 members of the Voskresenye Baptist community in Ivanovo who were holding an event in a movie theater and distributing the New Testament and Book of Psalms. The organizers had a written agreement with the theater. The reason given for the inspection appeared erroneous. The police tried to intimidate the detainees and urged them not to attend Baptist meetings, stating it was a "harmful sect."

A complicated case regarding the disruption of an April 2006 meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow was still pending at the end of the reporting period. In April 2006 the Lyublino Police Department of Moscow disrupted a religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses, and officers detained and interrogated 14 male leaders of the congregation, taking their passports. Police refused to provide written reasons for their detention, reportedly physically assaulted their attorney Vitaly Sinyukov when he went to the police station to assist them, and threatened him at knife-point not to file a complaint. In June 2006 a Moscow district court found the detention of the plaintiffs unlawful but dismissed the

remainder of the suit because the Jehovah's Witnesses did not have legal permission to hold the meeting. Both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the police appealed the decision, and on March 22, 2007, the court reversed the decision, ruling that the detention had in fact been lawful. The Moscow City Court refused to allow the ECHR judgment *Kuznetsov v. Russia* to be introduced as evidence in the case.

Attorney Vitaliy Sinyukov filed a suit against the Lyublino District Police Department. After his case was dismissed in April 2006, Sinyukov appealed to the Moscow City court, which reversed the ruling and returned the case to the Lyublino District Court. Again, the Lyublino District court dismissed the case and Sinyukov appealed again to the Moscow City Court, which reversed the ruling in part and returned the case to the Lyublino District Court for partial consideration of its merits. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

While most detentions for religious practices were of Muslims, there were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslims on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked them to cease their proselytizing activities, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes.

The Government designated the Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organization in 2003. The SOVA Center reported that in 2007, members were convicted for their participation in the organization in Orenburg Oblast, Tobolsk, Naberezhnye Chelny, Bashkortostan, Cheboksary, and Chelyabinsk Oblast. According to human rights experts, the prosecutions were marred by violations of due process, including the use of torture.

In September 2007 in Cheboksary, five persons were sentenced to more than 4 years in prison for "belonging to a banned organization" and disseminating Hizb ut-Tahrir pamphlets in a mosque. The authorities claimed that the publications contained incitements to violence and promoted religious and ethnic hatred.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country. However, there were numerous reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In February 2008 the Government enacted a law that enabled religious educational institutions to receive state accreditation and issue official diplomas. According to the SOVA Center, this will make religious education more competitive with state education since graduates would be able to compete in the job market with official diplomas.

During the reporting period, President Putin met with religious leaders and spoke several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials in St. Petersburg reported that their situation in northwest Russia had improved. The officials said that the investigation into the activities of their Administrative Center had been suspended and they were able to engage in constructive dialogue with government officials regarding the general situation on religious freedom.

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of government and NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance.

The Commission for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, a government body headed by the Human Rights Ombudsman, released its annual report on human rights on March 14, 2008, and publicized the difficulty that some religious groups faced in property restitution and land acquisition, and the difficulties that religious minorities faced with government officials.

Federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. In 2006 work began on the construction of a \$100 million (2.4 billion rubles) Moscow Jewish community center on land donated by the Moscow city government to house Jewish community institutions including a school, a hospital, and a major new museum devoted to the history of the country's Jews, the Holocaust, and tolerance. The construction was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2008. In December 2007 Ilya Klebanov, PolPred for the Northwest Federal District who publicly embraces his Jewish heritage, opened a large permanent exhibit on Jewish culture in the Russian Empire at the Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including some physical attacks against individuals and communities because of the victims' religious affiliation. Groups that monitor hate crimes reported at least 70 incidents of vandalism against religious targets, including 36 aimed at Jews, 12 against members of the ROC, and 11 against Muslims.

In May 2008 a Stavropol court convicted Roman Koyushev of murder on religious hatred grounds for the killing of Imam Kurdzhiyev in 2006. Koyushev is appealing his 20-year prison sentence.

In September 2007 in Voronezh Oblast, a first grade student whose family belonged to the local Christ Community Protestant Church, was beaten by his classmates after he refused to take part in an Orthodox prayer led by a priest.

In August 2007 three men attacked the building supervisor at the Orthodox Cultural and Educational Center and broke windows. The attackers said they had come to beat "Jehovists." The SOVA Center linked this attack to the "anti-sectarian" campaign run by the Mestnye (Locals) movement.

In July 2007 Kurmagomed Ramazanov, an imam and the deputy mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Dagestan, was killed along with his brother by a car bomb in Makhachkala. Representatives of his organization and a member of the Russian Council of Muftis claim that the murder was organized by Wahabbis. Ramazanov was an outspoken critic of Wahabbism and other foreign influences on Muslims in the country.

In July 2007 in Kirov Oblast, unknown men sprayed pepper gas into a Baptist church during a service.

In February 2007 police charged suspects in the 2004 killing of Nikolay Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis. The case was expected to go to trial in the summer of 2008.

Anti-Semitism remained a serious problem, and there were several anti-Semitic attacks on synagogues during the reporting period, including on June 1, 2008, in Dzerzhinsk, where unknown attackers threw a Molotov cocktail at the synagogue, starting a small fire outside the building.

In June 2008 a professor at a Tyumen University asserted her belief in the medieval accusation that Jews ritually murder Christian children and use their blood to bake matzos. Professor Svetlana Shestakovaya's lecture was part of the state-sponsored educational program "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture," which has been introduced in schools in several regions, at times as part of the compulsory curriculum.

On April 23, 2008, at a rally on Triumph Square in Moscow of around 400 far-right nationalists, speakers called for the murder of various government officials, praised terrorist methods, and demonized Jews. Members of the National Great Power Party of Russia, the Union of Orthodox Standard Bearers, and the neo-Nazi Slavic Union held signs condemning "Jewish fascism" and the "Jewish mafia," and calling on Slavic women to "guard the purity of your race."

On March 20, 2008, hundreds of anti-Semitic announcements warning Russian parents to beware of the supposed Jewish practice of using children's blood to prepare Passover matzos were put up around the city of Novosibirsk in southwest Siberia.

On February 14, 2008, a joint study by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Jewish Congress found that many school history textbooks completely avoid the subject of the Holocaust despite the fact that the Nazis and their collaborators killed millions of Soviet Jews. Pogroms during the Russian Civil War were not mentioned in most textbooks. One textbook reportedly dramatically undercounted the number of Jews in the Russian empire in the 19th century, using the figure 175,000.

In January 2008 the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia issued a statement expressing concern over a spate of attacks that month and commended law enforcement agencies for their prompt and effective response. On January 29, 2008, a group of more than ten members of the Russia All-National Movement attacked a synagogue and Jewish community center in Ulyanovsk. The attackers marked the walls with swastikas and other graffiti, shouted threats, and left behind pamphlets. No one was hurt in the incident. The police responded to the scene and detained four of the attackers. On January 27, 2008, unknown persons in Volgograd desecrated a Holocaust memorial for the 600 Jewish civilians shot there during the Nazi occupation. On January 23, 2008, three men broke into a synagogue in Nizhniy Novgorod and vandalized it. The men beat a guard who tried to detain them, and Police later arrested them. The Federation noted the positive actions by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and noted that "punishment for such crimes is becoming an increasingly realistic prospect."

On November 17, 2007, a member of the Krasnodar regional parliament strongly hinted that "world Zionism" is to blame for many of Russia's problems in an on-line Question and Answer forum posted on the website of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (kprf.ru). Nikolai Osadchy answered a wide variety of questions from on-line visitors posted to the party's website. He called for "the liberation of the [ethnic] Russian people and other native peoples [of Russia] from the control of transnational corporations. Or, according to the analysis of several politicians, from the control of world Zionism."

Charges of "hooliganism" were common for crimes that would normally be considered bias crimes against a particular community, but prosecutors, even by governmental admission, were reluctant to pursue aggravated charges of racial bias in crimes and were often content with the lesser charge being applied. At times, there was a fear of not being able to win a court judgment of a bias crime. In those instances where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts often imposed suspended sentences.

There were many reports of anti-Semitic publications during the reporting period. A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles, many of which appeared to violate the law against extremism, were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of other anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country. The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeded one hundred, many sponsored by the local chapters of the National Power Party. In addition, there were at least 80 websites in the country that featured anti-Semitic content.

Terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya promoted negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-ROC religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religious groups.

Most religious groups participated in interfaith dialogues, although the national leaders were more likely to participate and were more open than were leaders at the local level. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups. In the Muslim-dominated regions of the Tatarstan Republic and the surrounding Volga region, tensions between Muslims and ROC believers occasionally emerged.

A small splinter group of the ultranationalist Russian National Unity (RNE) organization called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhny Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Karelia, the authorities limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to its local affiliates. According to SOVA Center, there were neither registration denials nor registrations of RNE during the reporting period. In February 2007 the Supreme Court upheld the decision by a Krasnodar court to ban the Krasnodar Orthodox Slavic community, an Orthodox Old Believers group that used neo-Nazi symbols.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs. Government officials, journalists, and the public liberally labeled Islamic organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and ROC believers were generally harmonious. Extremely traditional or orthodox versions of Islam were often associated in the public mind with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

As in previous reporting periods, there were many violations against houses of worship, meeting halls, and cemeteries across the country. Incidents ranged from threats and graffiti to arson. Local authorities often investigated the cases as "hooliganism" and not under the stronger anti-hate laws, although there were signs that prosecutors were using the hate-crime laws more often. Under the law, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial and religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced for up to 3 years confinement.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues and Jewish community centers during the reporting period, including in Moscow, Astrakhan, Nizhny Novgorod, Dzerzhinsk, Tula, and Vladivostok. Vandals also desecrated several Jewish cemeteries and memorials during the reporting period.

The SOVA Center reported 27 violations of houses of worship in 2007, including 7 against Jewish sites, 6 against Orthodox sites, 6 against Protestant sites, 4 against Muslim sites, 2 against Catholic sites, and 1 each against Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon sites. This was a slight increase from the 25 acts recorded in 2006.

The SOVA Center reported an increase in acts of vandalism of cemeteries--34 cases in 2007, compared to 24 in 2006. These acts targeted Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish cemeteries, and in most cases were conducted by teenagers.

During the reporting period, relations between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches remained positive. Both the Catholic Archbishop in Moscow and the Moscow Patriarchy of the Orthodox Church publicly agreed in October 2007 that their charitable activities should not be used for proselytization.

African-Russian and African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches were often subject to religious and racial bigotry.

The press routinely continued to reference members of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they have been present in the country for approximately 100 years.

In previous reporting periods, Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported physical attacks against their members throughout the country. The officials were unable to update these figures for this reporting period, citing the difficulty of collecting the information.

A case appealed to the ECHR continued 4 years after a provocative exhibit on religion was vandalized at the Sakharov Center. Although the authorities never prosecuted the vandals, a court found the Center Director and a staff member guilty of inciting religious hatred and fined them.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the Government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences, and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, asserting that these groups threatened national security. During the reporting period, television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religions.

In April 2008 the United Russia party's youth wing, Young Guard, picketed the building of the kindergarten in Chelyabinsk that had been rented by a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation for services. The picketers had signs reading "Totalitarian Sects Get out of Chelyabinsk," and "Don't Let the Sect Brainwash You."

In 2008 the Muslim community of the Perm region published petitions in the local press stating concerns that the newly established Jehovah's Witnesses center in Solikamsk, a city in Perm Krai, would adversely affect the stability and peace established between the traditional confessions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the consulates general in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok regularly raised reported violations of religious freedom with government officials. The Embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of cooperative programs designed to train law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration and other Government agencies, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping embassy staff informed on issues they raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and MFA.

One position in the embassy's political section was dedicated to human rights, including religious freedom issues. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in the Embassy and consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. U.S. officials raised such issues with the MFA and with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers comprised a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the Embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services, maintain contact for emergency planning purposes, and inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He met with many religious leaders from the country and the United States to discuss their concerns.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

Officials of the U.S. consulates general in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities.

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