



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

2004 International Religious Freedom Report

The International Religious Freedom Report for 2004 is submitted to the Congress by the Department of State in compliance with Section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. The law provides that the Secretary of State shall transmit to Congress each year "an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom supplementing the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom." This Annual Report includes individual country chapters on the status of religious freedom worldwide.

Religious Freedom "Moral Foundation of All Just Political Orders," Powell Says Announces 2004 International Religious Freedom Report



The release of the U.S. Department of State's sixth annual International Religious Freedom report "signifies America's support for all who yearn to follow their conscience without persecution," said U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The report outlines barriers to and improvements in religious freedom in countries throughout the world, and designates certain countries as "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)" for severe violations of religious freedom. Five countries that had been designated CPC's in 2003 -- Burma, China, Iran, North Korea and Sudan -- have been re-designated as CPC's, with the addition of Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam this year.

Secretary of State Colin Powell announces the release of the sixth annual International Religious Freedom report, September 15. (AP)

"Let me emphasize that we will continue engaging the Countries of Particular Concern with whom we have bilateral relationships," Powell said. "Our existing partnerships have flourished in numerous capacities and they are just one of the best ways for us to encourage our friends to adopt tolerant practices."

Powell also commended countries such as Turkey and Georgia who "have adopted good practices or have taken steps to promote greater tolerance for all religious faiths."

The full text of the 2004 International Religious Freedom Report can be found at:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/>

Below find the text of Secretary Powell's remarks:

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
September 15, 2004**

ON-THE-RECORD BRIEFING

Remarks by Secretary of State Colin Powell at the Rollout of the

Report on the Release of the 2004 Annual Report on
International Religious Freedom

SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Today I submitted to Congress the Department of State's sixth annual Report on International Religious Freedom. Ambassador Hanford and his team have done an outstanding job preparing his report, and it is now available on the Department's website, www.state.gov.

America's commitment to religious liberty is older than our nation itself. The men and women who journeyed to this new world believed that one's conscience was sacred ground upon which government cannot tread.

Those courageous settlers cherished religious freedom as one of many inalienable rights inherent in human nature itself, one of those rights that formed the moral foundation of all just political orders.

As President Bush has said, religious liberty is the first freedom of the human soul. America stands for that freedom in our own country, and we speak for that freedom throughout the world.

With the release of today's report, we reaffirm the universal spirit of our nation's founding. We reaffirm that government exists to protect human rights, not to restrict them; and we stand in solidarity with people everywhere who wish to worship without coercion.

Country by country, this report documents the conditions of religious freedom around the world. We are always eager to commend nations that have made progress over the past year, and the report's Executive Summary acknowledges countries, such as Georgia and Turkey, that have adopted good practices or have taken steps to promote greater tolerance for all religious faiths.

But the report also makes clear that too many people in our world are still denied their basic human right of religious liberty. Some suffer under totalitarian regimes, others under governments that deliberately target or fail to protect religious minorities from discrimination and violence. By shining a light on this issue, this report signifies America's support for all who yearn to follow their conscience without persecution.

The report also identifies what we refer to as Countries of Particular Concern, governments that engage in or tolerate gross infringements of religious freedom. Our decisions are based on a careful assessment of the facts and represent a fundamental standard of human dignity that all nations should uphold.

Today we are re-designating five countries that, in our judgment, continue to violate their citizens' religious liberty: Burma, China, Iran, North Korea and Sudan. We are also adding three additional countries to this list: Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam.

Let me emphasize that we will continue engaging the Countries of Particular Concern with whom we have bilateral relationships. Our existing partnerships have flourished in numerous capacities and they are just one of the best ways for us to encourage our friends to adopt tolerant practices.

The release of today's report underlines our nation's commitment to the protection of religious liberty. This solemn duty has always defined the American character and will

forever shape our purpose in the world. Defending the sacred ground of human conscience is a natural commandment to all mankind, and America will always heed this call.

I would now like to introduce Ambassador Hanford, who will take you through the report and answer any questions that you might have. Thank you.

Created: 15 Sep 2004 Updated: 15 Sep 2004

2004 Preface

International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Why The Reports Are Prepared

This report is submitted to the Congress by the Department of State in compliance with Section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. The law provides that the Secretary of State, with the assistance of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, shall transmit to Congress "an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom supplementing the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom."

How The Reports Are Prepared

In August 1993, the Secretary of State moved to strengthen the human rights efforts of our embassies. All sections in each embassy were asked to contribute information and to corroborate reports of human rights violations, and new efforts were made to link mission programming to the advancement of human rights and democracy. In 1994 the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs was reorganized and renamed as the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, reflecting both a broader sweep and a more focused approach to the interlocking issues of human rights, worker rights, and democracy. In 1998 the Secretary of State established the Office of International Religious Freedom. In May 2002, John V. Hanford, III was sworn in as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

The 2004 Report covers the period from July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2004, and reflects a year of dedicated effort by hundreds of State Department, Foreign Service, and other U.S. Government employees. Our embassies, which prepared the initial drafts of the reports, gathered information throughout this period from a variety of sources, including government and religious officials, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, religious groups, and academics. This information-gathering can be hazardous, and U.S. Foreign Service Officers regularly go to great lengths, under trying and sometimes dangerous conditions, to investigate reports of human rights abuse, to monitor elections, and to come to the aid of individuals at risk because of their religious beliefs.

After the embassies completed their drafts, the texts were sent to Washington for careful review by the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs and the Office of International Religious Freedom, both in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. They worked closely with other State Department Offices and the Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who has ultimate responsibility for the Report on behalf of the Secretary of State. As they worked to corroborate, analyze, and edit the reports, the Department officers drew on reports provided by U.S. and other human rights groups, foreign government officials, representatives from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and institutions, and experts from academia and the media. Officers also consulted with experts on issues of religious discrimination and

persecution, religious leaders from all faiths, and experts on legal matters. The guiding principle was to ensure that all relevant information was assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

The Report will be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy, and making assistance, training, and other resource allocations. As mandated by the IRFA, it also will be used as a basis for decisions on determining countries that have engaged in or tolerated "particularly severe violations" of religious freedom. Countries involved in these and other violations according to the IRFA are not identified as such in this report, but have been and will be engaged independently by the U.S. Government. The Report also will serve as a basis for the U.S. Government's cooperation with private groups to promote the observance of the internationally recognized right to religious freedom.

A Word On Usage

In many cases, the International Religious Freedom Report states that a country "generally respects" the right of religious freedom. The phrase "generally respects" is used because the protection and promotion of human rights is a dynamic endeavor; it cannot accurately be stated that any Government fully respects these rights, without qualification, in even the best of circumstances. Accordingly, "generally respects" is the standard phrase used to describe all countries that attempt to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense.

"Generally respects" is thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned by this report.

2004 Acknowledgements

International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

With gratitude, we acknowledge those whose diligent labor and tireless commitment to religious freedom made this report possible. We thank the many Foreign Service officers at our embassies and consulates abroad for monitoring and promoting religious freedom, and for chronicling in detail the status of religious liberty.

Their work advances the cause of freedom, ensures accuracy in our reporting, and brings hope to repressed people around the world.

Within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs, we wish to recognize Jared Banks, Cynthia Bunton, Joshua Davis, Doug Dearborn, Solange Garvey, Mitchell Guttman, Linda Hayes, Victor Huser, David Jones, Karla Jones, Paige Krause, Leonel Miranda, Shannon Noble, Jennifer Pekkinen, LeRoy Potts, Larkin Reynolds, Ereni Roess, Andrea Schwartz, Kimber Shearer, Alison Silber, Sharita Smith, Sarai Stewart, Ross Taggart, Julie Turner, and Tanika Willis.

In the Office of Strategic and External Affairs, we extend our thanks to Jarrett Basedow, Gene Bigler, Sally Buikema, Carol Finerty, and Jeffrey Jamison. In the Office of the Executive Director, we are indebted to the work of Alonzo Simmons.

In the Office of International Religious Freedom, the following people deserve recognition for their part in preparing this report: David Abramson, Renee Cotton, Todd Deatherage, Kenneth Durkin, Whitney Ford, Nancy Hewett, William Inboden, Shellette Jackson, Mina Khalil, Christina Lopez, Janet Mayland, Joannella Morales, Rebecca Riggs, Sasha Ross, Whitney Sado, Iman Shebaro, Stephanie Wolfe, and David Young.

2004 Introduction

International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

As has often been observed, America was founded, in significant measure, by persons fleeing religious persecution and seeking a haven where they could live out their faith without fear of government interference or reprisal. Today, religious freedom remains for many Americans the most treasured of human rights, because it represents the very freedom to seek, know, and serve God according to the dictates of one's own conscience. Our nation's impulse to protect and champion this freedom is born of our history, is strengthened by our resolve to advance all fundamental human rights, and is enriched by the priority which many Americans continue to place on the importance of religious faith in their own lives.

What is less often acknowledged is that there are many nations and cultures around the world where religious freedom is equally valued as precious – indeed where large portions of populations would say that their freedom to believe and worship is their most vital and indispensable right. It is this aspiration that we seek to serve in this, the sixth annual *International Religious Freedom Report*.

The first edition of this report, in 1999, declared that "while religion can be a source of conflict, religious freedom – the right to pursue one's faith without interference – can be a cornerstone of human dignity and of all human rights...To cry out against the torture of people because of their religion, to demand the release of those imprisoned for religious belief, to insist that religious minorities be protected – these are not simply actions on behalf of the oppressed. They are also actions to indemnify a precious and universal right." As much as those words articulated the holistic priority of religious freedom, they also sounded a caution against the persecution of religious believers and the distortion of religion. Today, as at other times in history, some of the greatest threats to both our national security and to international peace define and even justify their violence in religious terms. This report, in advocating civil societies based on the respect of religious freedom, offers a compelling alternative.

The promise of religious freedom stands in stark, enduring contrast to the peril of religious extremism. Religious extremists cling desperately to the idea that religion demands the death of innocents and the destruction of liberty. We hold confidently to the idea that religious freedom respects the life of all and the cultivation of human dignity. While religious terrorism dictates violent intolerance, religious freedom encourages peaceful coexistence. What religious extremism demands as the iron rule of the state, religious freedom reserves for the sanctity of the individual conscience. Where religious terrorism defiles the sacred, religious freedom honors the sacred.

This is seen in practice as much as in principle. Nations that respect religious freedom rarely pose a security threat to their neighbors. Nations that protect religious pluralism defuse the appeal of religious intolerance and its violent corollary, religious terrorism. Nations that affirm religious liberty also lay a cornerstone of democracy and rule of law. For these reasons alone, promoting religious freedom is as much in our national interest as it is our national ideal. As we continue our efforts to shape a more secure, just, and peaceful world, religious freedom holds a prominent place.

And so religious freedom endures as an ideal, even while threats to it never cease. Though naturally endowed in all people, freedom does not occur naturally in the world. History bears abundant witness to the enduring tension between freedom's resilience as a natural

aspiration of the human heart, and freedom's fragility in the reality of human life. While the number of people living in freedom around the world today is strong and growing, too many others still suffer under oppressive regimes, authoritarian rulers, and intolerant systems. Freedom may be a reality for many, but it remains still only a dream for too many others.

Our own nation's founders well understood this paradox. Thus could the Declaration of Independence affirm the transcendence of freedom as a right of all people "endowed by their Creator," in all times and places, while at the same time protesting the too familiar tyranny which oppressed so many. Thus could President Lincoln declare that the Declaration promised "liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time." And thus can President Bush affirm, "Freedom is not America's gift to the world. It is God's gift to humanity."

In short, religious freedom is a hallmark of our nation's history, and it is a blessing that we seek to share. "Almighty God hath created the mind free," declared Thomas Jefferson in introducing the landmark Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, "and the rights hereby asserted are the natural rights of mankind." Such natural rights are not confined to Americans, nor should they be. This is one reason why Franklin Delano Roosevelt further enshrined this commitment as a national priority and international goal. In January 1941, as much of the world lay in chains or in peril and the war in Europe and Asia ominously approached our nation's door, he responded not just with economic and security assistance but also with the promise of the "Four Freedoms." One of these "essential human freedoms," he proclaimed, is the "freedom of every person to worship God in his own way -- everywhere in the world."

Our own nation's history has not been perfect, nor do we claim to be so today. We continue to strive, at home and abroad, to uphold religious freedom as the universal right that it is. The spiritual longings of the human heart have an innate dignity all their own, deserving our respect and demanding our protection.

The Annual Report

While religious freedom has come to be appreciated more and more as a universal principle, in too many countries today it is honored only in the breach. This report represents, in tangible form, the U.S. Government's ongoing efforts to help translate religious freedom from an ideal to a reality. It is one measure to bridge the divide between principle and practice. It combines analysis with endeavor. It details the legal situation, cultural context, and relevant policies, and it also describes efforts taken by the United States Government to oppose religious persecution and promote religious freedom. We do not confine our reporting to the negative. Many countries display an admirable respect for religious freedom, while other countries continue to improve in policy and practice. They are described here as well, and they bear witness to what is possible.

Yet the challenge remains, and must be met. Many people continue to suffer for the belief or practice of their faith, and many governments refuse to recognize or protect this natural and universal right. That religious believers willingly endure beatings, torture, imprisonment, and even death is a bracing reminder of the resilience of faith. That we can tell in this report of their plight and their perseverance is a testament to their courage. In 1998, Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act, which, among other things, commissioned this report, and created an office at the State Department with the mandate of integrating religious freedom advocacy into our foreign policy. President Bush has maintained this commitment, stating in his National Security Strategy that the U.S. Government will "take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments."

The Office of International Religious Freedom

The Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has now completed its sixth year. The Office has the simple yet daunting mission of promoting religious freedom worldwide. The Ambassador is charged with the responsibility of serving as the principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on matters of international religious freedom.

The Ambassador and his staff monitor the worldwide status of religious persecution and discrimination and devise strategies to reduce abuses. Just as importantly, they develop strategies to promote religious freedom, both to attack the root causes of persecution and as a means of advancing other fundamental U.S. interests, such as protecting other core human rights, encouraging the growth of mature democracies, and furthering the war against terrorism.

These strategies are carried out in a variety of ways, using the range of diplomatic tools available, including both formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign government authorities; participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe; cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs; and meetings with victims of persecution. Often the Ambassador and staff, along with other U.S. officials, engage in direct intervention in particular crises in order to remove people of faith from harm's way or to forestall further persecution.

In all cases, the Office, which is staffed with experienced Foreign Service and Civil Service officers, works closely with its counterparts elsewhere in the State Department, the U.S. Government, and in U.S. missions overseas. U.S. Foreign Service officers abroad form the front line of our religious freedom policy. Many of their activities, and those of the Office of International Religious Freedom, are discussed in Part III of the Executive Summary. Some of their most heroic actions, however, must necessarily remain out of the spotlight in order to protect those involved.

As I continue my term as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, I wish to thank all the employees of the Department of State here and abroad who have made this report possible. In particular, I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our human rights officers throughout the world, as well as the members of the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs at the State Department, who have worked long and hard to craft this report. I also want to express appreciation for the vigilant and bipartisan support that Congress has demonstrated on this issue. In addition, a debt of gratitude is owed to so many who work on behalf of the oppressed in non-governmental organizations. We rely on their on-the-ground reporting and extensive network of contacts to ensure that our report is as fair, accurate, and comprehensive as possible. Finally, I wish to thank my own staff in the Office of International Religious Freedom, whose commitment to religious freedom for all people is both indefatigable and inspiring.

John V. Hanford III,
Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom

2004 Executive Summary
International Religious Freedom Report
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Religious liberty lies at the heart of a just and free society. Enshrined as both a foundational American value and a universal principle, the right to freedom of religion is also a cornerstone of democracy. It is a vital measure in the creation and maintenance of a stable political system. Conversely, the failure to protect freedom of religion and other fundamental human rights can undermine social order, foster extremism, and lead to instability and violence. Assessing the status of religious freedom can often serve as one helpful diagnostic for the overall health and stability of a nation. For these reasons and others, promoting religious freedom continues to be an essential element of United States foreign policy. President Bush has observed that "successful societies guarantee religious liberty," and the Administration's National Security Strategy declares that the U.S. will "take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments."

The United States is not alone in this commitment. Religious freedom is a universal value, and almost all of the world's nations have signed one or more international agreements committing them to respect individual freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Beginning with the 1948 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and continuing with the nearly global ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the nations of the world have affirmed the principle that governments have a fundamental responsibility to protect freedom of religion. (See Appendices A and B for the texts of these documents.) In practice, however, this freedom is often restricted, abused or denied, and many people continue to suffer solely for following the dictates of conscience.

Ultimately, each nation's policies and practices regarding religious freedom must be measured against international norms. The United States acknowledges its own responsibility with respect to these norms in the safeguarding and protection of religious liberty.

In this summary of the status of religious freedom around the world, we examine barriers to religious freedom, note countries where religious freedom conditions have improved, and describe U.S. actions to promote international religious freedom. Millions of people around the world live under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes where religious belief and practice are tightly controlled. Some countries have discriminatory laws or policies that disadvantage certain religions; others are negligent in ensuring that religious minorities or adherents of "unapproved" religions do not suffer discrimination or persecution. Others stigmatize certain religions by wrongfully associating them with dangerous "cults" or "sects."

Sometimes intolerance has several components, including a religious dimension. Anti-Semitism, for example, touches on both religious discrimination and ethnic discrimination, and it continues to be a problem of great concern to the U.S. Government and the international community. This year's report shows a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism in several European countries, as well as ongoing anti-Semitism in many predominantly Muslim countries. To address this issue, in April the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) hosted in Berlin a second conference on anti-Semitism, in which Secretary of State Powell participated. As a result of these conferences, the OSCE is implementing a process to monitor and report in a consistent manner on anti-Semitic incidents. These conferences were the first multilateral gatherings devoted solely to this subject and also the first to deal with anti-Semitism as a human rights issue.

It should be noted that there is no Iraq report in this year's submission. In keeping with State Department precedent, we do not report on our own governance but welcome the scrutiny of other responsible reporters. The reporting period ends on June 30, which roughly coincides with the date of the transfer of power from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Iraqi Interim Government. In June, the Secretary acted to remove Iraq's designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its severe violations of religious freedom under the regime of Saddam Hussein. The Transitional Administrative Law, ratified in March, includes provisions for freedom of religion, including the right to "freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice." Early next year, the Department will release its annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, which will include a section on religious freedom in Iraq from the transfer of power to the Iraqi Interim Government through the end of 2004.

The Executive Summary consists of three parts. Part I identifies many of the countries where religious freedom is restricted and classifies their actions and policies into five categories. Part II provides examples of nations whose governments have taken significant steps to promote or protect religious freedom, even though serious problems may remain in those countries. Part III lists noteworthy actions the U.S. Government has taken to encourage other nations to promote religious freedom. Some countries are mentioned in more than one part of the summary, according to the type of action or situation being reported. Within Part I, several of the countries could be listed in more than one of the five categories; however, in the interest of brevity, a given country is listed only once, in the category that best characterizes the fundamental barriers to religious freedom in that country.

Part I: Barriers to International Religious Freedom

Totalitarian or Authoritarian Actions to Control Religious Belief or Practice

Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes seek to control religious thought and expression. Such regimes regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of their religious content. The practice of religion is often seen as a threat to the state's ideology or the government's power. Oftentimes, the state suppresses religions based on the ethnic character of the religious groups.

- **Burma.**
- **China.**
- **Cuba.**
- **Laos.**
- **North Korea.**
- **Vietnam.**

State Hostility Toward Minority or Non-approved Religions

Some governments, while not implementing full control over minority religions, nevertheless are hostile and repressive to certain ones, or identify religious groups as "security threats." These governments implement policies designed to intimidate and harass certain religious groups, demand adherents to recant their faith, or cause religious group members to flee the country.

- **Eritrea.**
- **Iran.**
- **Pakistan.**
- **Saudi Arabia.**
- **Sudan.**

- Turkmenistan.
- Uzbekistan.

State Neglect of Societal Discrimination Against, or Persecution of, Minority Religions

Some countries have legislation that discourages religious discrimination and persecution but fail to prevent conflicts, harassment or other harmful acts. Others do not respond with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by nongovernmental entities or local law enforcement officials.

- Bangladesh.
- Egypt.
- Georgia.
- Guatemala.
- India.
- Indonesia.
- Nigeria.
- Sri Lanka.

Discriminatory Legislation or Policies Prejudicial to Certain Religions

Some governments have enacted legislation that favors majority religions and discriminates against minority religions. This often results from a historical dominance of the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In such countries segments of the citizenry are often skeptical of new religions.

- Azerbaijan.
- Belarus.
- Brunei.
- Israel and the Occupied Territories.
- Malaysia.
- Moldova.
- Russia.
- Turkey.

Denouncing Certain Religions by Affiliating Them with Dangerous "Cults" or "Sects" Some Western European governments continue to use restrictive legislation and practices to brand minority religions as dangerous "cults."

- Belgium.
- France.
- Germany.

Part II: Significant Improvements in the Promotion of Religious Freedom

The International Religious Freedom Act prescribes that a section of the Executive Summary identify countries where "significant improvement in the protection and promotion" of religious freedom has occurred.

- Afghanistan.
- Georgia.
- India.
- Turkey.
- Turkmenistan.

Part III: U.S. Actions to Advance International Religious Freedom This section highlights U.S. Government actions in selected countries. Further details may be found in the individual country reports.

- Azerbaijan.
- Belarus.
- Burma.
- China.
- Egypt.
- Eritrea.
- France.
- Georgia.
- India.
- Indonesia.
- Iran.
- Israel.
- Laos.
- Malaysia.
- Nigeria.
- North Korea.
- Pakistan.
- Russia.
- Saudi Arabia.
- Sudan.
- Turkey.
- Turkmenistan.
- Uzbekistan.
- Vietnam.

Released on September 15, 2004

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Macedonia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The continued absence of provocative actions by state and non-state actors, and focus on a unified state for all citizens, has maintained a status of respect for religious freedom. The law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the establishment of places of worship and restricting where contributions may be made.

The generally amicable relationship among the various religious communities contributed to religious freedom. However, an area of concern is the deterioration in relations within the Orthodox Church community, specifically between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox churches. The Government openly sided with the Macedonian Church in this ongoing dispute.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 9,781 square miles, and its population is approximately 2 million. The country has two major religions: Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Nominally, approximately 66 percent of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, approximately 30 percent is Muslim, approximately 1 percent is Roman Catholic, and approximately 3 percent is of other faiths (largely various Protestant denominations). There is also a small Jewish community in Skopje. Religious participation tends to focus on major holidays or life cycle events.

Numerous foreign missionaries are active and represent a wide range of faiths. Many of these missionaries enter the country in connection with other work, often charitable or medical. Several Protestant missionary groups and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are active.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, the law places some limits on religious practices, including the establishment of places of worship and the collection of contributions.

The constitutional provision for religious freedom is refined further in the 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups. This law designates the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and the Methodist Church as religious communities, and all other religions as religious groups. However, there is no legal differentiation between religious communities and groups. In 1999, the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, and in practice the remaining provisions are not enforced consistently.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups contained a number of specific requirements for the registration of religious groups; these were struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1999. Consequently, there was considerable confusion over which procedures still applied, and several foreign religious bodies experienced delays in their efforts to register. This law tends to favor traditional denominations, registered as "communities". Other denominations registered as religious "groups" underwent stricter scrutiny by the Republic Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities, compared to traditional religious communities or organizations. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any delays or difficulties. In practice, religious groups need to register to obtain permits to build churches and request visas for foreigners and other permits from the Government.

In the spring, the Republic Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities introduced a new requirement that applicants for a religious worker visa must present evidence of completion of a theological education. During 2003, there were no reports that any applications for registration or visa issuance were denied.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups places some restrictions on the establishment of places of worship and parochial schools. It provides that religious rites and religious activities "shall take place at churches, mosques, and other temples, and in gardens that are parts of those facilities, at cemeteries, and at other facilities of the religious group." Provision is made for holding services in other places, provided that a permit is obtained at least 15 days in advance. No permit or permission is required to perform religious rites in a private home. The law also states that religious activities "shall not violate the public peace and order, and shall not disrespect the religious feelings and other freedoms and rights" of persons who are not members of that particular religion. The Government does not enforce actively most of these provisions of the law, but it acts upon complaints when they are received.

In June, the trial of Bishop Jovan (Zoran Vraniskovski) for inciting religious and ethnic hatred was ongoing and being monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Jovan also is accused of embezzling Macedonian Orthodox Church funds. Jovan led a schism within the Macedonian Orthodox Church that he and his followers refer to as "the Ohrid Archbishopric." They are closely aligned with the Serbian Orthodox Church and, like the Serbian Church, continue to reject the Macedonian Orthodox Church's 1967 claim of autocephaly, or independent status. The Public Prosecutor's Office brought the charge against Jovan following his January 11 arrest as he conducted a liturgy in his Bitola apartment. Police acted on complaints from building residents that the service had disrupted public peace and order; he was released from pretrial detention on January 30. On February 5, the United States delegation to the OSCE formally raised its objection to Jovan's inappropriate detention.

Jovan's home was vandalized on February 20, and unknown intruders forcibly cut the hair of several nuns present. Jovan claimed the attackers were state agents, but there was widespread speculation that Jovan's followers staged the attack to generate international sympathy. At the end of the period covered by this report, an investigation was ongoing. Jovan was also arrested and detained for 5 days in July 2003 on charges of trespassing and disturbing the peace. He had attempted to baptize his niece at a Macedonian church; authorities claimed his attempt to do so constituted trespassing since he had earlier been defrocked by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and therefore was not a member of any recognized religious group.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups specifically allows for foreign citizens to carry out religious activities, but only at the request of a registered religious body. During the period covered by this report, several individuals were able to obtain religious worker or other worker visas. On July 22, 2003, U.S. citizen Serbian Archbishop Jovan Mladenovski was delayed at the Macedonia-Serbia border while authorities verified that he did not intend to perform religious work in the country in transit to Greece. He was permitted to resume his journey after a brief delay.

Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits; however, the Government has not taken any actions against religious buildings that lack proper construction permits. In the past, several Protestant groups have been unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities due to bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of complications and a registered Protestant group completed construction of a new church in Skopje.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting them only to places where religious rites and activities are conducted; however, in practice these provisions of the law are not enforced.

Children below the age of 10 years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or guardians. A law provides for religious education in the schools on a voluntary basis; however, the Government has not introduced implementation guidelines.

The issue of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav Government still has not been resolved fully. Some progress was made in restitution of previously state-owned religious property. Many churches and mosques had extensive grounds or other properties that were expropriated by the communist regime. Virtually all churches and mosques have been returned to the ownership of the appropriate religious community, but that is not the case for many of the other properties. Often restitution or compensation claims are complicated by the fact that the seized properties have changed hands many times or have been developed. In view of the country's very limited financial resources, it is unlikely that religious communities will gain restitution of many of the expropriated properties.

In November 2003, the Jewish community met with the U.S. Ambassador to raise the issue of a recent incident in which despite the 1997 law on property restitution prohibiting the sale or transfer of any "Jewish" property, a parcel of land with a small structure on it in the center of Skopje had been transferred. According to the 1997 law, this transfer should be reversible. The Jewish community representatives indicated that they had notified the Prime Minister as well as the Minister of Finance, who responded with statements of support. They added that the transaction was approved by the Ministry of Transportation. In April, the Jewish community announced the restitution of six properties but expressed some frustration with the slow pace of developments.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

As of June, a judge was considering the Bektashi religious sect's suit against the Government for not reversing the former Yugoslavia's nationalization of the Bektashis' Tetovo compound, the Arabati Baba Tekke. The Bektashi also have filed suit against the Macedonian Islamic Community, armed members of which seized the complex in August 2002 and continue to occupy it.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, Bishop Jovan and the Serbian Orthodox Church's public rejection of and activism against the Macedonian Orthodox Church's independence provoked angry responses by the public, press, and government. Parliament's unanimous January 23 vote supporting the Macedonian Church's independence reflected public sentiment. The Government at times sided with the Macedonian Church by applying the law against Jovan and Macedonian Church clergy who declared loyalty to the Serbian church.

The religious communities in the country often reflect an ethnic identity. Specifically, most Muslims are ethnic Albanians. However, there are a number of ethnic Macedonians who are Muslim. Ethnic Macedonians contend that they often are associated with the policies of

ethnic Albanian Muslims, which they do not always support. In addition some ethnic Macedonian Muslims contended that the state sometimes confused them with ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks because of Muslim surnames and mixed marriages and, in some instances, assigned their children to Albanian language classes. However, societal discrimination is more likely to be based upon ethnic bias than upon religious prejudice.

During the period covered by this report, there were reports of vandalism of religious properties. In February, two explosions occurred in Bitola: one at a furniture store owned by an ethnic Macedonian Muslim and the other at the Asan Baba mosque. In March during the period of unrest in Kosovo, unknown attackers threw several Molotov cocktails at a mosque in Kumanovo. None of the Molotov cocktails exploded, and there was only minor damage to the mosque. Later during the period covered by this report, it was reported that two churches in the Tetovo region had been vandalized following Easter services. A collection box was stolen, but damage was minor, leading some to assert that the act was criminal in nature and not necessarily religious. There were no reports of destruction of places of worship.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and Embassy staff met with leaders and representatives of the various religious communities, as well as with government officials, to address religious freedom issues and support the new Government's policy of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives have met with the Archbishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the defrocked Bishop Jovan, and the Minister of Interior in connection with the dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox churches. On each occasion, the Embassy has urged respect for religious freedom and the rule of law.

Released on September 15, 2004

Appendices

- [Appendix A: Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Appendix B: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#)
- [Appendix C: Training at the Foreign Service Institute Related to the International Religious Freedom Act](#)
- [Appendix D: Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) International Religious Freedom Act \(IRFA\)](#)
- [Appendix E: Overview of U.S. Refugee Policy](#)

Related Material

- 09/15/04 [Secretary Powell's Remarks at Rollout of International Religious Report 2004](#)
- 09/15/04 [On-the-Record-Briefing: Release of the 2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom](#); John Hanford, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious

Freedom; Remarks at Release of the 2004 Annual Report on International Religious
Freedom; Washington, DC

--09/13/04 [Special Press Briefing and Release of Annual Report on International Religious
Freedom -- September 15](#)