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Russia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom by discriminating among religious groups and denying some groups legal status. In practice, the government enforced these restrictions. There is no state religion, but the dominant Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and other "traditional" religious communities receive some preferential consideration. Religious minorities, in particular Muslim followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi's work, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists, faced bans on their religious literature and difficulties registering their legal entities.

The government's level of respect for religious freedom in law and in practice declined with respect to some minority denominations during the reporting period; the government began bringing criminal cases for the first time against individuals in possession of banned religious literature or who were associated with an illegal religious group. Conditions remained largely unrestricted for "traditional" religious groups. Conditions for "nontraditional" religious groups remained largely the same. The government continued to target several of those groups when it enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fell 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 raids on religious organizations and detentions of individuals.

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. 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.

The U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials, and other U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions. The U.S. government engaged a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious

freedom. 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 (MVD) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID).

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 single set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the following statistics are compiled from government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, although only 5 percent of Russians call themselves observant. With a population estimated between 10 million and 23 million, Muslims form the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. The majority of the country's large economic immigrant population comes from Muslim countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. 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 two million adherents. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. Estimates of the country's Jewish population range between 250,000 and one million, with the majority living in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In some areas such as Yakutiya, Chukotka, and Mari-El, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or along with other religions.

According to an annual report by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), 23,494 religious organizations were registered as of January 1, 2010 -- 416 more than as of January 2009. In 2008 these groups broke down as follows: Russian Orthodox (12,586), Muslim (3,815), Protestant (several denominations totaling 3,410), Jehovah's Witnesses (402), Jewish (286), Orthodox Old Believers (283), Catholic (240), Buddhist (200), and other denominations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution protects religious freedom, but other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. In practice, the government enforced these restrictions. Religious minorities, in particular Muslim followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi's work, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists, faced bans on their religious literature and difficulties registering their legal entities. Although the constitution provides for the equality of all religious groups before the law and the separation of church and state, the government did not always respect these provisions.

The 1997 Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (1997 law) provides the right to believe individually or with others, the right to spread religious and other convictions, and the right to act in accordance with those convictions. These rights may be restricted only to the degree necessary to protect the constitutional structure of the government, morality, health, the rights and legal interests of persons, the defense of the country, or the security of the government. No one may be forced to disclose his or her attitude toward religion, or to participate or not in worship, other religious ceremonies, the activities of a religious association, or the teaching of religion.

The law states that those who violate religious freedom will be "punished to the full extent possible," but does not specify what the punishment will be, nor under what circumstances it will be imposed. The Administrative Violations Code and the criminal code both punish obstruction of the right to freedom of conscience and belief; however, there were no reports of any instances in which these articles were enforced.

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In practice redress is sought through the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, which makes rulings based on violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. Russia's Constitutional Court has declared that "[d]ecisions by the European Court of Human Rights are binding for Russia. The State must pay compensation to a person whose rights were violated as determined by the European Court and make sure his/her rights are restored as far as it is possible." The government continues to pay compensation in line with ECHR decisions, but has yet to enact reforms.

The Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman has a religious freedom department, which receives and responds to complaints. The ombudsman often intercedes on behalf of those who submit complaints. He cannot compel other government bodies to follow the law, but his attention has yielded some improvements in the respect of religious freedom.

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

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. Such groups are not registered with the government and consequently do not have 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, or the armed forces. Individual members of a group, however, 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 sometimes encountered difficulty in doing so.

A "local religious organization" (LRO) 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. LROs 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. The ECHR has declared that the 15-year requirement violated the European Convention on Human Rights' provisions on the freedoms of religion and association.

"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 50 years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

On June 10, 2010, in *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia*, the ECHR unanimously found that the government had violated the Witnesses' rights to a fair trial, freedom of religion, and freedom of association by banning their Moscow community and ordered the government to end the violations and redress their effects. The court also assessed monetary damages against the government. On September 9, 2010, the Russian government requested referral to the Grand Chamber of the ECHR. However, on November 22, 2010, the panel of the Grand Chamber rejected Russia's bid to have the case reviewed. The judgment is therefore final, and the applicants were awarded a total of 70,000 euros (\$93,800), which was due on the date of the December 13 announcement. As of year's end the government still had not made the payment.

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.

Besides the 1997 law, some provisions of the 2006 Law on Public Associations--the nongovernmental organizations (NGO) law--apply to religious organizations as well. The NGO law grants the MOJ 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. The NGO law contains extensive annual reporting requirements that many groups found burdensome. Each organization must supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body. The government may close by court order organizations that do not comply.

The 1997 law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups on various grounds such as violating public order or for extremist activity, and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Groups that fail to register may be subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), that is, deprivation of legal status.

The 2009 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation states that "ensuring national security includes countering extremist activity by nationalist, religious, ethnic, and other organizations and structures directed at disrupting the Russian Federation's unity and territorial integrity and destabilizing the domestic political and social situation in the country."

As of the end of the reporting period, 18 Muslim groups were banned as terrorist organizations. According to human rights groups, bans on Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to detain some Muslims arbitrarily for alleged connections to these groups. The regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan have laws banning "extremist Islamic Wahhabism."

Nurjular and Tablighi Jamaat remained banned. The government maintains that Nurjular is a Muslim religious organization of followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi. Muslims who read Nursi's books maintain that there is no Nurjular organization. A Russian human rights lawyer with legal expertise on religious issues stated that these Muslims go to the same mosques as other Muslims and have no separate organizational structure. The ban on Nurjular rests on the conclusion that Said Nursi's works are "extremist" and promote intolerance. The human rights lawyer maintained that the books of Said Nursi are no more extremist than other religious books, including the Bible, that warn of eternal punishment for sin. As for Tablighi Jamaat, the general prosecutor maintained that it is a radical organization whose goal is the re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate, but Tablighi Jamaat and some human rights activists claimed that the organization follows the law and exists solely to educate persons about Islam.

Citizens are equal before the law without regard to their religion. Establishing benefits or limitations or other forms of discrimination because of a person's attitude toward religion is not allowed. By law officials representing organs of the state do not have the right to use their position to compel others to adhere to any religious beliefs.

The country is by law a secular state without a state religion, where all religious organizations are equal before the law. 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 recognizes the "special contribution" of Russian Orthodox Christianity to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

While neither the constitution nor the 1997 law accords 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, police, and the military. Nearly all of the religious facilities in prisons are Russian Orthodox.

By executive order, Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists must make up 10 percent of a military unit before an official chaplain of that religion can be appointed. According to a Defense Ministry survey, two-thirds of the country's soldiers are religious adherents, and 83 percent of those are Russian Orthodox, with 8 percent Muslim and 9 percent from other denominations, including Protestants.

The military employs approximately 200 chaplains, drawn from the Russian Orthodox Church. They are hired and paid from local command budgets, but the Defense Ministry plans to proffer military rank and create an Institution of Military Clergy to include the four major religions. The Slavic Center for Law and Justice addressed an open letter to Defense Minister Serdyukov, stating that the introduction of the military chaplain system in the way it is understood by the Defense Ministry and the Moscow Patriarchate violates the Russian Constitution. In addition to the chaplains, an estimated 2,000 ROC priests work with members of the military, as do a smaller number of Muslim and Protestant clergy. Approximately 950 of these "unofficial chaplains" are stationed permanently with a military detachment. ROC activities with the government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, holding religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperating with the MVD to combat extremism.

As of the end of the reporting period, according to the ROC and the SOVA Center, an NGO which seeks to combat extremism and nationalism, out of 455 religious facilities in penitentiary institutions, there are 421 Orthodox churches and 517 Orthodox prayer rooms, 25 mosques and 87 Muslim prayer rooms, seven Buddhist dugans and seven Buddhist prayer rooms, three Catholic chapels and one Jewish prayer room. There are reportedly 71 Russian Orthodox chapels and three Islamic mosques under construction. There are also reportedly 230 Christian Sunday school groups.

Interfax reported that the ROC asked the Moscow city government for land for 200 new churches and that the request was approved. Muslims continued to have difficulty obtaining approval for a fifth mosque in Moscow.

Civil society activists contend the government shows special favor towards the ROC by providing free security for Patriarch Kirill, and not for any officials of the other three "traditional Russian religions."

Some observers expressed concern regarding the ROC's increasing political power. Government officials routinely consulted with ROC leaders on policy. The ROC may review all draft legislation pending before the State Duma. A deputy from the ruling United Russia party assured reporters that comments from other religious groups would also be considered, if "they represent a significant portion of the electorate."

The ROC has issued public statements advocating the unity of church and state into "one community" with "two autonomous powers." It also has emphasized that it believes in tolerance and harmonious relations between religious groups, but that "Russia is an Orthodox country" in regard to history, culture, tradition, and number of believers.

The 2002 Law on Countering Extremist Activity (extremism law) can affect religious groups by criminalizing a broad spectrum of speech and activities. Among the forms of "extremist activity" is "incitement to social, racial, national, or religious discord."

Courts often request expert analyses of religious literature in cases where the government alleges extremism. The choice of experts appears to be a matter of the court's discretion. Within the MOJ, a Scientific Advisory Board (not to be confused with the Council of Experts for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis) reviews some religious materials for extremism. Composed of academics and representatives of the four traditional religions, the board reviews materials referred either by judicial and law enforcement authorities or private citizens and organizations. If the board identifies what

it considers extremist material, it issues a nonbinding, advisory opinion, which is then published on the MOJ website and forwarded to the prosecutor's office for further investigation.

In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, there are regional "experts" that also review some religious materials for extremism. According to NGOs, the quality of scholarly expertise of these persons varies from region to region and affects the merit of evaluations made on issues of extremism. Some experts possess a thorough background in theological studies, while others do not and are merely supporters of a local branch of the ROC or the local authorities.

By law, publications declared extremist by a court are automatically added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials. 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 religious groups (Christianity in particular), and texts that were explicitly racist or anti-Semitic. The list, which was established in July 2007, increased from 692 items to 768 by year's end. In total the government has banned 58 Jehovah's Witnesses publications, 29 Church of Scientology books, 14 books of Muslim theologian Said Nursi, and four Falun Gong publications.

On July 13 and October 12, an appeals court in Khanty-Mansysk overruled a March 26 decision of a Surgut City Court classifying Scientology literature as extremist. The appeals court dismissed the charges because Scientologists were not permitted to offer testimony or cross examine witnesses and remanded the case for retrial. On December 9, a new panel at the Surgut City Court found in favor of the church. The government appealed that decision. That appeal continued at year's end. Despite these rulings overturning the original decision, the MOJ reportedly included the works of L. Ron Hubbard in the Federal List of Extremist Materials on July 13. A request by the Church of Scientology to the MOJ to remove these works from the list of extremist materials was denied by the ministry, which demanded a note from the Court of Surgut verifying its original decision was no longer in force. The church maintains that the Surgut decision never entered into force, since it was immediately appealed, giving the ministry authority to immediately remove materials from the extremist list. No response to this request had been made at year's end.

On September 21, a court in Krasnoyarsk Krai (region) found a Said Nursi book to be extremist, relying on an expert study requested by the Federal Security Service (FSB) over a study from Moscow State University that found the book was not extremist. The Krasnoyarsk Muftiate appealed the decision on October 21.

On October 22, a court in Kemerovsky declared six Jehovah's Witnesses books extremist. Pursuant to that decision, the MOJ added the books to the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The decision has been appealed. On December 30, a court in New Uralsky ruled that five of the six Jehovah's Witnesses books declared extremist by the Kemerovsky court were not extremist in nature. Decisions to the contrary taken by other courts at the same level did not cause the books' removal from the list.

The government's visa rules allow foreigners (including religious workers) with business or humanitarian visas to spend only 90 of every 180 days in the country. The effect of these rules has been to severely restrict religious groups that rely upon foreign religious workers. Catholics and Mormons have been particularly hard hit by this provision. The 90-day limit on their stay in the country impacts their ability to work and significantly increases their expenses. Many organizations continued to report difficulties associated with the visa rules.

Chairman of the Joint Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith Bishop Sergey Ryakhovsky expressed concern that legislation passed on December 8 as part of the government's program to attract foreign investment for a planned high-tech center in Skolkovo is at odds with existing statutes, which allow for religious scholars to be classified as professionals. The new law states: "Foreign nationals cannot be admitted to Russia as highly skilled specialists for occupations that entail preaching and other religious activities that involve performing sermons and other religious rites and ceremonies, or the teaching of religion followers of any denomination."

The federal government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it allows public use of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Religion is taught in Sunday schools, in public secondary schools, and in specialized religious schools (lyceums, gymnasias); the latter have the status of secondary educational institutions.

A governmental pilot program in religious education that began in April 2010 continued in 19 regions, including the Muslim-majority North Caucasus and the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East. A Russian human rights group with legal expertise on religious issues expressed concerns with the program, stating that dividing children up along religious lines for religion classes would do little to help them understand their classmates of different religious beliefs and might engender intolerance among them in the future.

As in past years, some regions offered a course on the history of religion. Although the Ministry of Education rejected the use of a controversial textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, some schools continued to use the text. The textbook also contained descriptions of some religious groups that members of those groups found objectionable.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Orthodox Christmas (January 7) and the adoption of Christianity in Russia in 988 (July 28). Muslim lawmakers have asked for a similar national holiday to mark the arrival of Islam in the country. Several regional governments, including majority-Muslim Chechnya and Tatarstan, celebrate other Islamic religious days as official holidays.

The law prohibits religious associations, but not their members, from participating in elections of government officials, political parties, and movements, and providing material or other aid to political groups.

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 standard military service period is 12 months, while alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 18 months, and alternative service in a nondefense agency is 21 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 attending religious training institutions are not eligible for education deferrals from military service.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom selectively. Certain laws and policies restrict religious freedom by discriminating among religious groups and denying some groups legal status. Conditions remained largely unrestricted for "traditional" religious groups. Conditions for "nontraditional" religious groups remained largely the same. The government continued to target several of those groups when it enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fell 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 raids on religious organizations and detentions of individuals. Several examples in each category are detailed below.

The MOJ maintains a list of religious organizations (including Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups) that have not submitted the appropriate registration documents for review. These organizations may be dissolved.

According to an annual report by the MOJ, as of January 1, 2010, there were 23,494 registered religious groups operating in the country, 54 percent 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 MOJ sent notifications of violations to 2,996

such organizations. The courts issued rulings to dissolve 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

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, such as the Scientologists, 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

Despite years of trying to register its religious organizations, the Church of Scientology has no registered religious organizations in the country. The ECHR has ruled in favor of the Church of Scientology in Moscow, finding that the government must re-register it. The ECHR has also ruled in favor of the Churches of Scientology in Surgut and Nizhnekamsk, which the government had denied registration on the grounds that they had existed in those localities for less than 15 years. The ECHR declared that the 15-year requirement violated the European Convention on Human Rights' provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. The court awarded monetary compensation for damages and legal costs to the groups. Another case initiated by the Church of Scientology regarding the 15-year rule remained pending at the ECHR. By the end of the reporting period, the government had not implemented the ECHR decisions.

Law enforcement officials, the ROC, and legislative bodies called for 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.

Within the MOJ there is a Council of Experts for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis. The head of the council, Alexander Dvorkin, is an outspoken proponent of categorizing minority religious groups as extremist cults and "totalitarian sects." The term "sect" is commonly used pejoratively in the country. Minority religious groups, NGOs, and international observers dispute the council's objectivity in making recommendations on which religious groups should be registered. The Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religion and Sects and the Information-Consultation Center of Saint Irineus of Lyons (St. Irineus Center) both proclaim the dangers of "totalitarian sects" and are supported by the ROC. Among the groups so labeled are Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, neo-Pentecostals, and Mormons.

According to Portal-Credo.ru, on August 20, the Council of Heads of Protestant Religious Associations of Rostov sent a request to the Department for Combating Extremism of the MVD requesting that the department look into the St. Irineus Center. The council stated, "the staffs of this center and its affiliates...have [i]n their publications and statement to the news media...grossly and falsely present[ed] often fabricated information that demeans the dignity of citizens of Russia and causes disruption within civil society."

According to a press report, a court in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast prohibited the activities of a Pentecostal group named the Ark of Salvation Church, stating that its activities encroached on individual rights and freedom of citizens to the detriment of the morals and health of persons. The prosecutor said the group's religious services, including "service release" (which involves the expulsion of demons from the body), had a negative impact on the psychological health of citizens, even though no evidence proving any harm to the health of churchgoers was presented. The group has been operating in the oblast since 1998.

According to the SOVA Center, on August 18, the Department of Culture and Art in Nyagan, Khanty-Mansysk published a list of totalitarian sects and required local institutions to prevent groups on the list from using movie theatres and recreation centers and refuse to provide facilities for the groups' events. The list included members of the Russian Associated Union

of Christians of Evangelical Faith (ROSKhVE) and the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith Pentecostals (RSKhVEP), Messianic Jews, Krishnas, Mormons, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Scientists.

On July 6, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported that authorities in the Sholokhov district of the Rostov Region had refused to grant permission to the "Christ the Savior" church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Pentecostals to build a church in the village of Veshenskaya after Archpriest Vladimir Polyakov led 20 Orthodox citizens to oppose the project. The village has a population of 10,000.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that several attempts to hold annual conventions in Nezlobnaya (Stavropol), Bratsk (Irkutsk), and Tula (Tula) with thousands of their members in attendance were interrupted, delayed, or cancelled due to interference from government authorities. In Nezlobnaya, after 2,000 Jehovah's Witnesses arrived to participate in a three-day convention, police blocked the main entrance of the convention site for five hours, did not permit the Jehovah's Witnesses to use microphones once admitted, and later broke up the meeting after the electricity to the building was cut. The next day, the site was ringed with garbage trucks and police, which prevented the Jehovah's Witnesses from entering. Police then allegedly found a suspicious package and ordered everyone to evacuate the area. When the Jehovah's Witnesses moved to a nearby town, the same officials arrived and stopped the program, detained the group's leader, and fined him 1,000 rubles (\$33) for holding a religious meeting without informing the authorities. In contrast, the Jehovah's Witnesses convention in Voronezh faced none of these restrictions. Jehovah's Witnesses also reported that they were frequently unable to rent stadiums or other large venues due to alleged government pressure on the management of those facilities.

According to the Russian news agency Interfax, on October 8, authorities blocked off usual access to the Cathedral Mosque in Moscow. Authorities also blocked off the sidewalks, and some Muslims had to pray in the street. Authorities did not provide any explanation for blocking off access to the mosque, one of four in Moscow.

Many nontraditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship either by renting or buying from public or private vendors. Construction permits have also been denied.

In the greater Moscow region, Muslim groups previously complained that they had been limited to only four official mosques. The number of official mosques throughout the country has increased to 241. According to public comments by Mufti Gaynutdin, 7,200 mosques have been built in the country in the last 19 years.

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.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era or acquire new property. The SOVA Center stated 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.

Property claims by the ROC are legally complicated. 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 ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims, including claims to 30 properties in Moscow alone. On December 2, the Russian government approved a law to transfer property of religious significance to religious organizations, including land, buildings, and

movable property. The law, which was accompanied by much debate, grants religious organizations ownership of all historical property in their use. Currently, religious organizations have the right to use such state property indefinitely. It is expected that the ROC will become one of the country's major property holders as a result. Museum curators had especially strong concerns about the fate of rare, historic artifacts that make up current collections. Additionally, some Baptist, Catholic, and Lutheran churches were transferred to the ROC.

In June 2010 more than 40 countries met to work out a set of guidelines and principles to cover the restitution of real property that was confiscated by Nazi, fascist, and other regimes during the Holocaust. Despite agreeing to the previous stage of negotiations, the government's delegation was the only one present that did not sign on to the guidelines and principles.

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 and some regional officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, 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.

The Catholic community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property has been returned, the community has had no success with buildings that have been privatized. A Moscow Catholic leader stated that some problems had been resolved positively and that the Catholic community would continue to work with authorities at the federal and local levels to resolve these problems.

Often at the behest of representatives of a majority religion, some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, to restrict the activities of religious minorities. The federal government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the procurator general of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religious groups. There were credible reports that individuals within the FSB 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 MOJ to reject registration applications. Some of the difficulties encountered by religious groups are also possibly due to local corruption and the demands made by corrupt officials on religious officials. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a concerted government effort against their religion exists. The religious group obtained a document which purportedly is from the FSB instructing police in Sochi on how to act against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Seventh-day Adventists reported continuing challenges for schoolchildren who observe Saturday as their Sabbath day. In some schools authorities refused to allow these children to take exams on a different day. According to an NGO with expertise in this area, school authorities in the Ryazan region and the Republic of Kalmykia have refused to accommodate the Adventists.

Notwithstanding verdicts in favor of Jehovah's Witness in a tax evasion case, on February 16, 2010, the tax inspectorate froze the bank account of the group's Administrative Center and transferred 4.3 million rubles (\$138,000) to the government. The tax inspectorate appealed the Arbitration Court's suspension of the tax evasion order, but lost that appeal on September 16. By year's end, the tax inspectorate had not returned the 4.3 million rubles (\$138,000).

In some areas of the country, Muslim women reportedly were not allowed to wear headscarves in educational establishments. These included the village of Batrak in the Kamensky District of the Penza Region, the village of Shamhal-

Station in Dagestan, and students at the Arsk Teachers College of Tatarstan. In contrast, in other areas of the country, the regional government of Chechnya purportedly encouraged women to wear headscarves in educational establishments and government offices.

In December 2010 in Gorno-Altay, Aleksandr Kalistratov, the head of the Jehovah's Witnesses community there, was accused of possessing extremist literature, which was confiscated from his home. His other alleged crime was "exclusivity" -- stating that his religion was the truth and all other religions were untrue. Scholars from the nearby Kemerov University reviewed this case for the court and determined that it was a case of exclusivity. Kalistratov faces a possible sentence of two to four years in jail. Hearings continued at year's end.

Taganrog authorities accused local Jehovah's Witnesses of possession of extremist literature with intent to distribute across the country. The local court ruled against the Witnesses. The case was appealed to the ECHR.

On April 26, 2010, the Federal Service for Oversight in the Field of Communications, Information Technologies, and Mass Communications in the Ministry of Communications and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) revoked the license to distribute Jehovah's Witnesses' periodicals *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*, on the grounds that they were "extremist." Contrary to law, this action was taken in the absence of a court order. On October 27, the Moscow City Arbitration Court dismissed a legal petition by the Jehovah's Witnesses to dismiss the actions of Roskomnadzor as unlawful. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal on December 3, and at year's end no decision had been made by the court.

On July 23, the Presbyter Roman Panasenko of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists appealed a decision that found his church in Millerova (Rostov) guilty of educational activity without a license. At issue were the church's bible study and club, which engaged in teaching the church's adherents from the Bible.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country, including detainees. Some NGOs accused the government of using counterterrorism methods to commit violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were cases of Muslims being charged with extremism or terrorism in the absence of clear connections 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. Local police allegedly subjected some persons suspected of Islamic extremism to abuses ranging from confiscation of physical property to torture. The government also began prosecuting individual Nursi readers and Jehovah's Witnesses under the criminal code rather than the administrative code. Ilham Islamlı, a Said Nursi reader, was the first person convicted in these cases. At least 14 other cases are in various stages of investigation and prosecution.

Religious groups outside the four traditional groups have sometimes been subject to harassment because of their outsider status. Most detentions for religious practices have involved Muslims, despite Islam's status as a traditional Russian religion, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of other religious groups' members on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries throughout the country for brief periods or asked them to stop proselytizing, regardless of whether they were actually violating local statutes. There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country.

In December 2009 the Supreme Court upheld a September 2009 decision by a lower court in Taganrog which dissolved the Jehovah's Witnesses' LRO in Taganrog and declared 34 of their publications "extremist."

Muslims who read the works of Said Nursi continued to face detentions, raids, and fines during the reporting period. These actions and continuing bans on Said Nursi's works remain a concern for the Muslim community.

On August 18, Ilham Islamli became the first Said Nursi reader to be convicted by a Nizhny Novogorod court of extremism, article 282. Islamli received a 10-month suspended sentence because his website had published Nursi works online. Islamli had been in prison since June 18.

According to IslamNews.ru, on September 17, police surrounded a Muslim prayer room in an industrial complex at the conclusion of Friday prayers in Moscow. They proceeded to inspect the local residents at the gates, but took Muslims from out of town to a van for inspection. Police maintained that they were acting upon a tip from the local population.

In February 2010 in Kaluga (Kaluga Region), 11 armed police officers with dogs raided a Lutheran ordination service. Police stated they were acting on a tip about a "sect" using "extremist" literature. During the one-hour search, no extremist literature was found; nevertheless, the church's pastor was summoned to the local police station. No further developments were reported.

According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, on March 11, 2010, Sergey Borisov, mayor of Obor (Khabarovsk Territory), allegedly entered a Baptist prayer service with some men and attacked the Baptists after they allegedly refused to present their documents. Police began an investigation, and the Baptists appealed to the regional anti-extremism unit to investigate. No further developments were reported.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, on March 23, 2010, police entered a Jehovah's Witnesses worship service in Novouralsk. Police filmed the meeting and recorded personal information of the 26 persons in attendance.

Since December 2009, authorities in Suzdal and Vladivostok have confiscated at least 14 churches belonging to the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC). The ROAC does not recognize the authority of Patriarch Kirill. No further developments were reported.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March 1, 2010, court bailiffs sealed the Taganrog Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. It can no longer be used for meetings. This is a consequence of the December 2009 Supreme Court decision upholding the dissolution of the Taganrog congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. As of the end of the reporting period, none of the Jehovah's Witnesses' other LROs had been dissolved. On June 1, 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the December 2009 decision to the ECHR.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported that on March 11, 2010, the Sayangorsk City Court (Khakasia Republic) ordered the demolition of a two-story house that was owned by the pastor and the administrator of the Glorification Pentecostal Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith. No further developments were reported.

In July 2009 members of the Baptist community were arrested and called to the prosecutor's office, where authorities told them that they could not engage in religious activities in Kaliningrad without official registration. In September 2009 two Baptists were arrested in Kaliningrad for singing psalms in the streets. Police said that they were not permitted to hold a public meeting. The Baptists were fined 2,200 rubles (\$71).

In March 2010 in the Khasavyurt area of Dagestan, local FSB officers detained two Jehovah's Witnesses in the street and held them for seven hours without access to a telephone or a lawyer. The officials did not identify themselves and did not explain on what charges they were holding the two men. The two Jehovah's Witnesses sent a complaint to the general prosecutor, as well as to the human rights ombudsman. Both federal officials responded by asking Dagestan authorities to investigate the possible violation of the two Jehovah's Witnesses' rights.

Forum 18 reported that on May 7, 2010, police in Lobnya (Moscow Region) arrested Maria Zubko and Anna Melkonyan, while they were proselytizing. Police accused the women, who reportedly have no prior convictions, of committing robberies in the area. It is unclear whether the police accused them because they were Jehovah's Witnesses or because

they had no suspects for the burglaries. On July 1, authorities released the women after 56 days of pretrial detention. The charges against them have not been dropped, nor are they free to leave the city without permission.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, who declared that the republic "would be better off" if it were ruled by Sharia (Islamic law), continued to enforce his ban against women entering government institutions without headscarves. According to the SOVA Center, the regime in Chechnya is nonsecular notwithstanding the constitution's provision for secular government. In June 2010 news media reported a series of 12 incidents in Chechnya in which unknown men in police and military uniforms had fired paintball pellets at women who were not wearing headscarves. According to a report from the NGO Human Rights Watch, on July 3, on a local television station, President Kadyrov expressed approval of the paintball attacks and said he was ready to give an award to the men who participated. Kadyrov stated that the targeted women deserved this treatment and that they should be so ashamed as to "disappear from the face of the earth." According to Human Rights Watch, this practice ceased in the second half of 2010. During the Muslim religious holiday of Ramadan, women were harassed for not covering their bodies in a conservative Islamic manner.

Police across the country participated in raids on various minority religious groups, often confiscating religious literature and other property. The following instances are representative of such raids, but do not constitute an exhaustive list.

On August 4, government officials, reportedly including FSB, Special Operations State Militia (OMON), and Moscow police entered the Moscow Scientology offices, destroyed office property, and reportedly assaulted several staff members, leading to one hospitalization. Over the 13-hour period of the raid, the security forces reportedly verbally abused and insulted the Scientologists and stole money, cameras, personal computer equipment, and mobile phones. The office computers and approximately 63 hard drives were reportedly confiscated and not returned. After the raid, 45 Scientology staff and family members were summoned to the prosecutor's office for interrogation focused primarily on the theological beliefs of Scientology. Authorities previously interrogated Scientologists and confiscated literature at the center in March 2010.

In early 2009 the First Deputy Prosecutor General sent a letter to prosecutors' offices throughout the country ordering wide-ranging investigations of all Jehovah's Witnesses congregations. The FSB requested that the prosecutor's office launch these investigations. Subsequently, prosecutors' offices, the FSB, and police summoned members of congregations and LROs for questioning and visited Kingdom Halls and personal homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of these orders, there have been more than 500 recorded investigations of congregations and unregistered groups of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Since the rulings declaring many Jehovah's Witnesses' publications "extremist," police have detained numerous Jehovah's Witnesses across the country for up to several hours, usually without a warrant. Jehovah's Witnesses reported approximately 265 recorded incidents of detentions, searches, and seizure of literature in the country between January and April 2010.

On May 12, 2010, police in Chelyabinsk subjected Jehovah's Witnesses to 12 separate searches and confiscations of literature in homes, workplaces, and religious buildings. Those being searched received no copies of search warrants and did not regain their confiscated materials. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police also confiscated a camera and video equipment that deaf members use to conduct meetings with sign language. Police had previously raided the same congregation in 2000, for which the ECHR awarded Jehovah's Witnesses monetary compensation in 2007.

In 2009 and 2010, authorities raided many private homes searching for the works of Said Nursi. They detained Muslims and their associates in possession of those works, some of them for several days. Some of those individuals faced criminal charges for participating in or organizing activity in a banned religious group. If convicted, they face up to three years in prison. The trials for Nursi reader Ziyautdin Dapaev and others continued at the end of the reporting period.

According to the website Portal-Credo.ru, on August 3, MVD officers blocked the entrance to the Almetevsk mosque in Tatarstan. They detained the worshippers and began searching all of the cars. The officers then arrested three men, including religious freedom lawyer Rustem Valiullin. Thereafter, they reportedly beat Valiullin.

In May 2009 authorities in Ramon (Voronezh Region) detained Yury Panov and Nikolay Sitnikov, two Jehovah's Witnesses. Police identified the men as suspects in several local robberies and took them to the local police station, where they were fingerprinted and photographed. When the men refused to acknowledge any involvement in the robberies, police allegedly forced Panov to wear a gas mask, to which they cut off the oxygen supply. They also allegedly threatened Panov with sexual assault and electrically shocked him. Under duress Panov admitted committing the crime. Police subsequently released both men and dropped all charges, stating that they had made a mistake. On July 30, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the Voronezh Region Prosecutor's Office wrote to Yuriy Panov, stating that police had been ordered to perform an investigation into how police treated him and to discipline the officers involved. There were no further developments in this case during the reporting period.

On April 4, 2009, FSB and police officials in Vladikavkaz detained and verbally abused two attorneys and one other traveler from Canada representing Jehovah's Witnesses in a local court case involving the possible dissolution of four congregations in North Ossetia. Officials claimed that the lawyers had entered a zone forbidden to foreigners when they pulled off the highway to visit the home of their driver's relatives. On April 5, 2009, the local judge ruled that all three foreigners would be deported for entering an allegedly restricted zone and for being disrespectful to the police. The lawyers would be barred from the country for five years if the deportation rulings come into force. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the ruling; the case was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Moscow city authorities granted the Hare Krishnas permission to build a religious structure after many years' wait.

On December 30, a court in New Uralsky ruled that five Jehovah's Witnesses books were not extremist in nature. A Kemerovsky court had already ruled that the same books were extremist, and the MOJ had added the books to the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The New Uralsky decision did not countermand the Kemerovsky decision.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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. Terrorism and violence in the North Caucasus region promoted negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-ROC religious groups sparked harassment and occasional physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to differentiate between economically motivated crimes and those based on xenophobia or religious discrimination.

According to the SOVA Center, there were several acts of vandalism against religious sites, including 16 attacks against Orthodox sites, 14 against Jehovah's Witnesses, nine against Muslim, eight against Jewish, three against Protestant, two against Armenian and one against pagan sites. There were 27 acts specifically against cemeteries alone, 24 of which were against Orthodox cemeteries, two against Muslim cemeteries, and one against a Jewish cemetery.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, attacks against individual members continued during the reporting period.

In June an unknown person set fire to a Baptist church in Karachayevo-Cherkessia. On August 20, Interfax reported that police had a suspect in custody who had confessed to the crime saying that he was under the influence of alcohol at the time and did not have any specific motives for the crime.

According to Portal-Credo.ru, on August 20, the Council of Heads of Protestant Religious Associations of Rostov sent a request to the Department for Combating Extremism of the MVD to investigate an employee of the Taganrog deanery of the ROC, V.P. Storchak, for extremism. The council stated that Storchak had published pejorative materials over the past five years about evangelical and Seventh-day Adventist Christians and preached the "superiority of the beliefs of one religious organization with respect to another."

On September 11, the local Orthodox community in the Tekstilshchiki district of Moscow held a protest against the construction of a new mosque on Volga Boulevard. Kirill Frolov, the director of the Association of Orthodox Experts reportedly said, "We have sent the mayor of Moscow a demand: until the program for the construction of 600 Orthodox churches in Moscow is completed, not a single mosque should be built." In October more than 9,600 local residents signed a letter to President Medvedev opposing the mosque's construction. In late October, the district government stated that it had not officially provided the land for the mosque and sent a letter to the mayor asking that another site be chosen. On October 11, Imam Shamil Aliautdinov of Moscow's Cathedral Mosque stated that just to accommodate the local Muslim population, Moscow needed 100 mosques. At year's end there were four mosques in Moscow.

On October 12, Kommersant reported that outside of Tyumen unknown attackers had shot and killed Imam Isomitdin Akbarov from the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. Police opened a criminal investigation.

Also in October, a 22-year old neo-fascist with links to the Nationalist Socialist Society was sentenced to life for the murder of 15 persons, some of whom were Jewish. According to the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Scientific Research Institute, there are more than 150 neo-Nazi groups in Russia, and the number is rising.

On November 1 and 2, attackers set fire to two Orthodox churches and one Baptist church in Karachayevo-Cherkessia. Archbishop Feofan issued public remarks calling the acts a provocation, but stating that they would not be successful at destabilizing interfaith harmony.

Although Jewish leaders reported significant improvements in official attitudes towards Jews, anti-Semitism remained a significant problem at the societal level. On July 10, the Liberal Democratic Party organized a Duma roundtable called "On the Question of Recognizing the Genocide of the Russian People," which resulted in the declaration blaming the "international Zionist financial mafia" for genocide against the Russian people. The SOVA Center registered eight acts of anti-Semitic vandalism. There has been a reduction in vandalism due to a decrease in the activities of the nationalist groups Russian Way and Resistance, which had been very active in these crimes. According to the NGO Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, law enforcement officials are investigating vandalism in Voronezh, where 20 Jewish gravestones in a local Jewish cemetery were knocked down on July 27. On October 7, anti-Semitic inscriptions appeared on a Jewish synagogue in Barnaul. The local police are investigating.

Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and occasionally staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religious groups.

On October 22, 2009, the Tyumen Region Prosecutor's Office announced that Svetlana Shestakova, a professor of sociology in Tyumen and member of the missionary department of the local ROC, had been charged with incitement to religious hatred after lecturing to students about blood libel, a false accusation against Jews, and other remarks offensive to Muslims, non-Orthodox Christians, and Krishnas. On July 9, a Tyumen court dismissed incitement charges due to the expiration of a statute of limitation, according to the NGO Union of Councils of Former Soviet Jews.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions.

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 religious groups, characterizing them as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and asserting that these groups threatened national security. Television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these groups included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religious groups. The press routinely continued to refer to Jehovah's Witnesses as a "sect," although they have existed in the country for more than a century.

Journalists and the public liberally labeled Islamic organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

There was evidence of a concerted government campaign to limit the sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature. However, there were 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 were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country. In addition there were at least 80 Web sites in the country with anti-Semitic content. According to the Moscow Bureau of Human Rights, anti-Semitic material on Russian-language Internet sites increased in 2010.

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 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. As a result, hate-crime legislation was often not enforced.

In instances where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts often imposed suspended sentences. In some cases, however, the hate-crime motive was taken into consideration. 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 to up to three years' confinement.

There were some reports that the government prosecuted individuals for anti-Semitic statements or publications during the reporting period. The government publicly criticized nationalist ideology and expressed support for legal action against anti-Semitic acts.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government continued to engage the government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. Embassy officers met with and actively sought feedback on the status and concerns of representatives of the Office of the Commission on Human Rights in the Russian Federation, and representatives of Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Church of Scientology religious groups, among others.

One position in the embassy's political section was dedicated to reporting on the status of religious freedom. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in the embassy and consulates general 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 MID and MVD. Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers constituted 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 consultations with government officials. He met with many religious leaders both from the country, including the most senior members of the ROC, and from the United States to discuss concerns.

The U.S. government continued to engage the government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom by meeting with the human rights ombudsman and other high-ranking officials to make the U.S. position known. 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 LROs, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering LROs.

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

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