



Bangladesh

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice—subject to law, public order, and morality—the religion of one's choice. The Government's respect for religious freedom was inconsistent, and due to the action of extremists, the year was marked with harassment and violent attacks against the Ahmadiyya community. Religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies and the majority of its citizens.

Citizens generally are free to practice the religion of their choice; however, police are normally ineffective in upholding law and order and are often slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crimes. Although the Government states that acts of violence against members of religious minority groups are politically or economically motivated and cannot be solely attributed to religion, religiously motivated violence was a continuing problem.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination by the Muslim majority, and the year was marked with harassment of Ahmadis. During the period covered by this report, the Government was led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which heads a four-party coalition that includes two Islamic parties, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote. A large majority of Hindus traditionally votes for the opposition Awami League (AL). In the 300-seat Parliament, religious minorities hold 7 seats--4 for the AL and 3 for BNP. Three non-Muslims hold deputy or state minister or equivalent positions in the Government. The acute animosity between the two mainstream political parties often leads to politically motivated violence and sometimes heightened societal tensions between Muslims and Hindus.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. After the April attacks on Ahmadis, the Ambassador visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom. Assistant Secretary for South Asia and Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia also visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters during their trips to the region in 2005 to emphasize the importance the United States places on religious freedom. Undersecretary for Political Affairs also stressed the protection of Ahmadis during official meetings

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles, and its population is 141 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder is mainly Christian (mostly Catholic) and Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are found predominantly among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali Christians can be found in many communities across the country and some indigenous groups in various areas are also Christian. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers vary from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents for each faith. There is no known indigenous Jewish community. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread and are sometimes evident in commentaries, particularly on the Middle East, in mainstream newspapers. Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who do not participate actively in prayers or services.

A national survey in late 2003 confirmed that religion is the first choice by a citizen for self-identification; atheism is extremely rare.

There is no reliable estimate of the number of missionaries, but several Christian denominations operate schools, orphanages, or other social programs throughout the country. A substantial number of missionaries, primarily based in Dhaka and Chittagong, are engaged in social development projects. Several faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including World Vision and Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, operate in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice--subject to law, public order, and morality--the religion of one's choice.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Government; however, all NGOs, including religious organizations, are required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government has the legal authority to cancel the registration of an NGO determined or suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and to take other actions, such as blocking foreign funds transfers, to hinder its operation. During the period covered by last year's report, the Government took action in a nontransparent manner against six NGOs perceived as anti-government or pro-opposition. In September 2003, one such NGO was closed temporarily after a government official claimed it had too many Hindus on its board of directors; however, it subsequently reopened. Another prominent NGO had its outside grants blocked after its director in 2001 wrote to the head of government and the diplomatic community to express concern over attacks on minorities during the election campaign then underway. Ultimately, the blocked grants expired in early 2004 and were not renewed until early 2005, when the Government released the funds and enabled the NGO to receive outside grants. Members of targeted NGOs reported harassment and intimidation, including pressure against traveling abroad to participate in religious freedom events, by law enforcement and intelligence officials.

The law neither permits citizens to proselytize nor prohibits proselytism; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam. Strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by Christian groups are aimed at serving communities that have been Christian for several generations or longer.

Shari'a is not implemented formally. In 2001, the High Court ruled illegal all fatwas, or legal rulings on Islamic law. Fatwas include decisions as to when holidays begin based upon the sightings of the moon, matters of marriage and divorce, the meting out of punishments for perceived moral transgressions, and other religious issues. Islamic tradition dictates that only those muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differ slightly depending on the religion of the person involved. There are no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different faiths.

Religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, as well as the majority of its citizens.

The Government provides some monetary support for the development of mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, and churches.

Major religious festivals and holy days of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths are celebrated as national holidays. The Bangladesh Christian Association has lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday.

Religion is taught in government schools, and parents have the right to have their children taught in their own religion; however, some claim that many government-employed religious teachers of minority religions are neither members of the religion they teach nor qualified to teach it. Although transportation may not always be available for children to attend religion classes away from school, in practice schools with few religious minority students often work out arrangements with local churches or temples, which then direct religious studies outside of school hours. There are at least 25,000 Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs, some government funded and some privately funded and run, according to a recent US Government study. There are no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warning that action would be taken against those attempting to disrupt the celebrations. Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Durga Purja, a major Hindu holiday in October 2004, and supported peaceful activities during Ramadan and before Eid Al-Azha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Despite the High Court's 2001 decision to rule all fatwas illegal, in practice village religious leaders sometimes make declarations in individual cases and call the declaration a fatwa. Sometimes this results in extrajudicial punishments, often against women for their perceived moral transgressions. In deeming all fatwas illegal, the High Court intended to end the extrajudicial enforcement of fatwas or other declarations by religious leaders. The pronouncement resulted in violent public protests. Several weeks later, the Appellate Court stayed the High Court's ruling, and subsequently no action has been taken. Given the heavy Appellate Court case load, it is unclear when the appeal will be considered.

The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, the right to proselytize is not discussed in the Constitution. Proselytism is neither permitted nor prohibited by law. Foreign missionaries were allowed to work; however, their right to proselytize is not protected by the Constitution. As is the case with other foreign residents, missionaries often face delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In the past, some missionaries who were perceived to be

converting Muslims to other faiths were unable to renew their visas, which must be renewed annually. In 2001, the Department of Immigration and Passports began to regularly issue a new type of visa for foreign missionaries. The processing of the new visas initially created complications; however, during the period covered by the report, there were no reports of current problems with obtaining these visas. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces and others closely monitored their activities.

There are no financial penalties imposed on the basis of religious beliefs; however, religious minorities are disadvantaged in practice in such areas as access to jobs in government or the military, and in political office. The Government has appointed some Hindus to senior civil service positions. Non-Muslims are not barred legally from any government position. However, religious minorities remain underrepresented in most government jobs, especially at the higher levels of the civil and foreign services. Selection boards in the government services often lacked minority group representation. The government-owned Bangladesh Bank employs approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Hindus dominate the teaching profession. Some Hindus report that Muslims tend to favor Hindus in some professions, such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants. They attribute this circumstance to the education that the British offered during the 19th century, which Muslims boycotted but Hindus embraced. Employees are not required to disclose their religion, but it generally can be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination in the application of the law, especially under the now-defunct Vested Property Act. The act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands to be expropriated by the Government. Approximately 2.5 million acres of land were seized from Hindus, and almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country were affected. Property ownership, particularly among Hindus, has been a contentious issue since partition from India in 1947. However, in April 2001, Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act. This law stipulated that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remain resident citizens. Hindus who fled to India and resettled there are not eligible to have their land returned, and the act does not provide for compensation for or return of properties that the Government has sold. By law, the Government was required to prepare a list of vested property holdings by October 2001, and claims were to have been filed within 90 days of the publication date. However, by the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not published the list of vested properties; the reasons for the extended delay could not be determined.

In 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act, allowing the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties. The properties are to remain under the control of deputy commissioners until a tribunal settles ownership. The amendment also gives the deputy commissioners the right to lease such properties until they are returned to their owners. The Government claimed that this provision would prevent the properties from being stolen.

Marriage rituals and proceedings are governed by the family law of the religion of the parties concerned; however, marriages are also registered with the state. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Men are permitted to have up to four wives, although society strongly discourages polygamy, and it is rarely practiced. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. In rural areas, marriages sometimes are not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his former wife alimony for 3 months, but this law is not always enforced.

In December 2003, anti-Ahmadi activists killed a prominent Ahmadi leader in Jessore and announced a January 23, 2004, deadline for the Government to declare Ahmadi to be non-Muslims. On January 8, 2004, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadi publications. The ban has not been formalized, but police detained a boy for 3 days for possession of Ahmadi books, and during demonstrations in April and May 2004, police entered and from two Ahmadi mosques and seized documents. On December 21, 2004, the Government printed a Gazette banning Ahmadi publications but did not release it. After local human rights activists and Ahmadi leaders filed a writ petition challenging the Gazette, the High Court stayed the ban. The Government has opposed court challenges to the ban on the grounds the ban has not been promulgated officially and is, therefore, beyond judicial scrutiny. With a few exceptions, police are not enforcing the ban.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of BNP harassment of Hindus, who traditionally vote for the AL, preceded and followed the 2001 election. Reported incidents included killings, rape, looting, and torture. The BNP acknowledged reports of atrocities committed between Muslims and Hindus; but claimed that they were exaggerated. The Home Minister was unable to confirm reports that Hindus had fled the country and insisted that there was no link between religion and the violence. He also dismissed allegations that the BNP was linked to the perpetrators. In 2001, the High Court ordered the Government to investigate and report on attacks on religious minorities and to demonstrate that it was taking adequate steps to protect them. The Government submitted its report to the High Court in 2002. The report claimed that some of the incidents of post-election violence were not connected to communal relations, and that some reports of violence were fabricated or exaggerated. Since then neither the High Court nor the Government has taken further action. There was no religiously related political violence surrounding the Chittagong elections in May.

Since the 2001 elections, religious minorities reportedly have continued to be targeted for attacks, which has led to the requirement for guards to be present at church and temple ceremonies. Reportedly, incidents include killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. These claims continued during the period covered by this report. However, many such reports have not been verified independently, and there

also has been violence during important Muslim holidays. The Government sometimes has failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who are often local gang leaders.

In June 2001, in Baniarchar, Gopalganj District, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church during Sunday Mass, killing 10 persons and injuring 20 others. The army arrived to investigate approximately 10 hours after the blast. Police detained various persons for questioning, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the police reported no progress on the case. A judicial commission was formed in December 2001 to investigate the bombing. In September 2002, the commission submitted its report to the Government. The commission's report blamed Sheikh Hasina and other AL party members for six of the seven bomb attacks that occurred in 1999, 2000, and 2001, including the June 2001 attack. However, two of the three commission members dissented, alleging that the head of the commission, Judge Abdul Bari Sarkar, had inserted his personal views in the final report. During the period covered by this report, the Government took no further action on the basis of the 2002 commission report, and the police were not pursuing the case actively.

In 2002, a Buddhist monk, Ganojyoti Mohasthobir, was killed at a Buddhist temple and orphanage at Rauzan in Chittagong. According to media reports, his killing was related to a land dispute. Then former Home Minister and Foreign Minister visited the temple after the killing. They assured the public that the incident would be investigated properly and that those involved would be brought to trial. Police subsequently apprehended three of the seven suspected in the killing. At the end of the period covered by this report, seven individuals had been convicted and given the death sentence. The convicted had appeals pending in the High Court.

In 2003, 11 members of a Hindu family burned to death after assailants set fire to their home near the port city of Chittagong. BDG officials ascribed the crime to robbers following a failed robbery attempt, but the opposition Awami League alleged that BNP members attacked the family as part of a local anti-Hindu cleansing effort. A local human rights NGO claimed that the attack was a planned assault on the family because of its Hindu faith. Government ministers visited the home within a few days of the incident and promised action against the perpetrators. Within a month of the attack police arrested 5 persons, 3 of whom confessed to the magistrate and claimed that 14 persons were involved in what they said was an attempted robbery. At the conclusion of the period covered by this report, police have submitted their investigations to court twice but the Public Prosecutor has declared the investigations "faulty," so a third round of investigation was in process.

On February 27, 2004, Humayun Azad, a Dhaka University professor and writer, sustained serious injuries when unidentified assailants stabbed him near campus. Azad, known for his criticism of Islamic fundamentalism, publicly blamed the attack on Muslim extremists. The Government provided Azad with medical treatment in Dhaka and later, at its expense, in Thailand, but at the end of the period covered by this report, the police investigation into the attack had not identified the assailants. Azad died of an apparent heart attack in Germany on August 13, 2004, and there were no new developments in his case.

Feminist author Taslima Nasreen remained abroad during the period covered by this report, while criminal charges were pending against her for allegedly insulting the religious beliefs of the country's Muslims. In May 2002, the Government banned one of her books, a sequel to an earlier novel that also was banned for being "anti-Islamic." In October 2002, a court sentenced Nasreen, in absentia, to a year in jail for her "derogatory remarks about Islam," in a case filed by a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader in 1999. In November 2003, a Dhaka court banned the sale or distribution of Nasreen's latest book, "Ka," an account of Nasreen's relationships with local intellectuals, in response to a defamation suit filed by a local writer; however, "Ka" was sold openly on street corners after the ban.

There were several bombings in 2004 and one in 2005, on February 20, at Muslim shrines in the Sylhet area. On May 21, 2004, the British High Commissioner was seriously injured by an explosion as he visited the Shahjalal Shrine.

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. On February 15 and 16, firebomb attacks on two social development NGOs, which extremists viewed as "un-Islamic," left at least eight workers injured. On February 23, the Government banned two Islamic extremist groups, Jammāt ul Mujahēedīn (JM) and the Jagrato Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), for their alleged complicity. There were no reports that either group targeted non-Muslims or Ahmadis.

Improvement and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Following demands by the Islami Okiyya Jote, an Islamist coalition partner of the ruling BNP, that Ahmadi publications be banned and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the Government announced such a ban on January 8, 2004. However,

several days later, the Prime Minister announced the Government would not declare Ahmadis non-Muslims.

In the fourth quarter of 2004, the Government took a more active stance against the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB), which spearheads anti-Ahmadi agitation, stopping two planned marches on the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka by an effective combination of political pressure and police deployments. At government direction, police in Ahmadiyya communities also became more active in protecting Ahmadis. However, in other cases, police did not stop extremist demonstrators from placing provocative signboards at Ahmadi mosques.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations between religious communities generally are amicable. Persons who practice different religions often join each other's festivals and celebrations, such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practice their faith without interference from Sunnis. Nevertheless, clashes between religious groups occasionally occur. Violence directed against religious minority communities continues to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives--religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes--are often unclear. Religious minorities are vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they are often reluctant to seek recourse from a corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Police are often ineffective in upholding law and order and are sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promotes an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against them.

In 2002, an AL-backed Convention on Crimes Against Humanity alleged "systematic persecution" of religious minorities and called for the perpetrators to be brought to trial under local and international law. In two cases, courts convicted the accused. In September 2003, a Speedy Trial Court in Barisal sentenced Ibrahim Khali and Dulal to life in prison (in practice 22½ years) for raping a Hindu woman at Annoda Proshad in Lord Hardinge Union of Lal Monhon subdistrict of Bhola district. The court also offered each convict a choice of a fine of approximately \$165 (Taka 10,000) or an additional 6 months in prison. Both convicts were serving their terms, and their appeals were pending in court. Also, in October 2003, a Speedy Trial Court sentenced six persons to life in prison and acquitted a seventh person accused of raping a Hindu woman after the 2001 parliament election in the Sadar sub-district of Bhola. The convicts appealed the verdict to the High Court; the appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. During 2004, 35 fatwa cases occurred in which 5 persons were lashed and others faced punishments ranging from physical assault to shunning of families by their communities. One human rights organization recorded 32 fatwa cases in 2002, in which 19 persons were lashed, and others faced punishments ranging from physical assault to shunning of families by their communities.

There are approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. In the latter part of 2003, they were the targets of attacks and harassment prompted by clerics and leaders of the Islami Okiyya Jote. Many mainstream Muslims view Ahmadis as heretics. In October 2003, 17 Ahmadi families in Kushtia were barricaded in their homes for several days. In November 2003, police stopped a mob of about 5,000 attempting to destroy an Ahmadi mosque in Tejgaon, Dhaka. In December 2003, anti-Ahmadi activists killed a prominent Ahmadi leader in Jessore; however, there were no results from the subsequent police investigations in any of these cases. On January 8, 2004, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadi publications; the ban has not been promulgated officially, but in April and May 2004, police entered and seized documents from Ahmadi mosques.

Throughout the first three quarters of 2004, the police provided minimal protection to Ahmadiyya communities facing harassment.

In April 2004, allegedly 12 Ahmadi houses were destroyed; 15 Ahmadi men and women in Rangpur reportedly were held against their will and pressed to renounce their faith. They were released after hours of verbal harassment; no legal action was taken against their assailants.

At the end of May 2004, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolan, a group of anti-Ahmadi Islamic clerics, reportedly threatened to evict thousands of Ahmadis from their homes in Patuakhali, Rangpur, and Chittagong. The same group also threatened to attack Ahmadi mosques in those districts. Many Ahmadis appealed to the administration for protection and security.

In October 2004, police and paramilitary troops prevented supporters of two anti-Ahmadi groups from attacking the Ahmadi mosque in a town 10 miles southeast of Dhaka. On October 29, 2004, an anti-Ahmadi mob injured 11 Ahmadis in an attempt to seize a mosque 100 miles east of Dhaka.

On December 21, 2004, the Government printed a Gazette banning Ahmadi publications but did not release it. After local human rights activists and Ahmadi leaders filed a writ petition challenging the Gazette, the High Court stayed the ban.

On March 11, 2005, following a week of processions throughout Bangladesh demanding that the Government declare Ahmadis non-Muslims, a mob attempted to lay siege to a mosque in the town of Bogra, hoping to remove the "Ahmadi Mosque" sign. Police controlled the mob but removed the sign. After a few hours, police put the sign back up.

On April 18, 2005, members of the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB), an anti-Ahmadi movement which has been lobbying the government to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims, attacked an Ahmadi community in the Shatkira district ransacking some homes and injuring over 50 persons after hanging a new sign on an Ahmadi mosque.

In April 2005, there was a spate of attacks on Ahmadis – none fatal – that indicated inadequate police protection. A pattern has developed where mobs approach an Ahmadi mosque with a sign declaring the place "a house of worship not a mosque" with the intention of replacing the current sign. Twice, the police aided the crowd by putting up the sign in what they claim is a preventive measure for controlling the mobs.

In general, citizens do not perceive Christians as Western society surrogates, and Christians are not targeted or harassed in response to citizens' widespread perception that the U.S.-led war on global terrorism is "anti-Muslim."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government routinely discusses religious freedom issues with officials at all levels of the Government as well as with political party leaders and representatives of religious and minority communities. During the previous reporting period, the U.S. Embassy encouraged Jamaat Islami to reiterate publicly its position that it supports tolerance and minority rights in the context of an attack on a religious minority member. Jamaat Islami demurred until April 2005, when Jamaat Islami released a public statement condemning attacks on religious minorities and the use of violence. During the previous reporting period, the Embassy also successfully encouraged the leader of a major political party to condemn attacks on Ahmadis. An article that the Ambassador wrote for local newspapers on Human Rights Day on December 10, 2003, stressed the importance of religious tolerance and other basic rights. Democracy and governance projects supported by the U.S. include tolerance and minority rights components.

Due to the increased attacks on Ahmadis, the U.S. Government made religious freedom a central point of discussion in meetings with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Law Minister, the Home Minister, and several other ministers beginning in December 2003 and continuing throughout this reporting period. The Embassy expressed its views on religious freedom to the media and public forums related to democracy and governance.

After the new attacks on Ahmadis in April 2005, the Ambassador visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom; Deputy Assistant Secretary did likewise in June. Assistant Secretary Rocca also visited Ahmadiyya headquarters in May 2004 to emphasize the importance the U.S. Government places on religious freedom.

Following demands for the ban of Ahmadi publications and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the Government announced such a ban on January 8, 2004. However, several days later, after senior-level representations by the Embassy and a visiting Congressional delegation, the Prime Minister announced that the Government would not declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. In addition, after the Embassy and several human rights organizations expressed concerns, the Government in March deferred action on legislation proposed by a BNP parliamentarian that would have created a blasphemy law based on the Pakistani model.

Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support.

The Embassy assisted U.S. Christian-affiliated relief organizations in guiding paperwork for approval of schools and other projects through government channels. The Government has been receptive to discussion of such subjects and generally helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy has also acted as an advocate in the Home Ministry for these organizations in resolving problems with visas.

The Embassy encouraged the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After an initial pilot program, the U.S. Government provided, among other topics, course work for religious leaders on human rights and gender equality.

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