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Japan

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles and a population of 127.5 million. Since the government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it is difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents of different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported that membership claims by religious groups totaled 206 million as of December 2007. This number, which is nearly twice the country's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is common to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites.

According to the agency's annual yearbook published in 2009 and carrying statistics of the calendar year of 2007, 105 million identified themselves as Shinto, 89 million as Buddhist, two million as Christian, and nine million follow "other" religions.

There are no governmental statistics on the number of Muslims in the country. The Islamic Center estimates there are approximately 100,000 to 110,000 Muslims of whom 10,000 are citizens.

As of December 2007, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the government recognized 154 schools of Buddhism. The six major schools of Buddhism are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzai sects), Nichiren, and

Narabukkyo. In addition there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, including Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of eight million "households." The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

As of December 2007, 182,310 out of 223,428 religious groups were certified by the government as religious organizations with corporate status, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification; however, certified religious organizations received tax benefits. More than 82 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2007.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Juridical Persons Law was amended to provide the government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The amended law requires certified religious organizations to disclose their assets to the government and empowers the government to investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious organization's for-profit activities if they violate these regulations.

The government does not observe any religious holidays as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

The Unification Church reported some adherents were pressured by family members and professional deprogrammers to leave the church.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although most groups report wide-spread tolerance and respect for religious freedom there were some reports of societal abuse based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

For several years deprogrammers working with family members have reportedly abducted Unification Church members, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religions. The Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses-affiliated organization Watchtower report the number of cases has declined sharply over the last 10 years. However the Unification Church reported five members were abducted during the reporting period. These reports could not be independently confirmed, and some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have accused the Unification Church of exaggerating or fabricating these reports.

In 2008 an adult member of the Unification Church was released after reportedly being held against his will by family members and a professional deprogrammer for over 12 years. Prosecutors did not pursue the case citing insufficient evidence. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period.

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In November 2009 a senior diet member reportedly called Christianity an "exclusive and self-righteous religion." The Japan Confederation of Christian Churches, an organization of Catholics and Protestants, demanded a retraction of the remark.

Significant interfaith efforts continued during the reporting period. The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, an interfaith NGO, worked to promote religious culture and contribute to peace. Members from the Islamic Center Japan spoke at churches and participated in interfaith peace prayers with Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist groups. In November 2009 the World Conference on Religions for Peace Japanese Committee, composed of various religious groups, co-hosted a conference to discuss how to foster peace in Afghanistan with diet members and with cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This conference was attended by diplomats, military officers, researchers, specialists, and religious leaders from 18 countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

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