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Japan

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 127.4 million. Since the government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it is difficult to determine accurately the number of adherents of different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported that membership claims by religious groups totaled 207 million as of December 2008. This number, substantially more than 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 during the year and carrying statistics for 2008, 108 million identified themselves as Shinto, 88 million as Buddhist, and 2.3 million as Christian, while 8.9 million followed "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.

As of December 2008, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the government recognized 155 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

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 and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice the government enforced these protections.

As of December 2008, 182,202 out of 222,723 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 receive tax benefits. More than 82 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2008.

The Religious Juridical Persons Law, as amended in response to the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, provides the government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The 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 law and 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 abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

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

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

On October 20, a vehicle parked in front of a mosque in Fukui Prefecture was set on fire with a sign reading "Foreign People Get Out." Leaders at the mosque, attended primarily by foreign university students living in Fukui, portrayed the incident as isolated and unusual and said they had positive relations with the local community. Police opened an investigation into the incident.

For several years deprogrammers working with family members have reportedly abducted Unification Church members, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religions. The number of reported cases has declined sharply since the 1990s. The Unification Church reported six members were abducted during the reporting period, two of which remained confined at year's end. One was reportedly released after police interviewed her parents. 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. On October 6, a civilian panel upheld the decision not to pursue criminal charges.

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In December a Japanese chain store stopped selling Nazi costumes after complaints from a U.S.-based Jewish organization.

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 September the World Conference on Religions for Peace Japanese Committee, composed of various religious groups, hosted an international conference of Muslim leaders in an effort to educate the public about Islam. During the same month, they hosted another meeting with religious leaders from throughout the country to promote religious harmony and nonviolence. More than 1,000 persons, including senior politicians and religious leaders, participated in this event.

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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