OVERVIEW AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Why and How the Reports are Prepared

The Department of State submits this report to the Congress in compliance with section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. U.S. embassies prepare the initial drafts of the reports based on information from government officials, religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, religious groups, academics, and others. U.S. foreign service officers go to great lengths, often under difficult circumstances, to collect the information on which the reports are based.

The Office of International Religious Freedom collaborates in collecting and analyzing information for the country reports, drawing on its own consultations with foreign government officials, religious leaders, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, representatives from the UN and other international and regional organizations and institutions, journalists, academic experts, community leaders, and Department of State offices. The Department’s guiding principle is to ensure that all relevant information is assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

The reports can be directly accessed at http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm in a format that allows readers to search the texts and compare reports across regions and themes. Translations of the report are available via www.humanrights.gov. Both the International Religious Freedom Report and the Human Rights Report spotlight examples of abuses and restrictions that typify and illuminate the types of problems frequently reported in each country in 2016. Specific inclusions or omissions should not be interpreted as a signal that a particular case is of greater or lesser importance to the U.S. government, or that a case is the only available example. Rather, our goal is to shed light on the nature, scope, and severity of the violations we report with illustrative examples. Both reports cover the calendar year so that readers can reference the two reports jointly and benefit from year-end data.

How the Reports Are Used

A wide range of U.S. government agencies and offices use the reports to shape policy; conduct diplomacy; and inform assistance, training, and other resource allocations. The Secretary of State also uses the reports to help determine which
countries have engaged in or tolerated “particularly severe violations” of religious freedom in order to designate “Countries of Particular Concern.” The reports are similarly used by the Secretary in determining which countries to place on the “Special Watch List” for having engaged in or tolerated “severe violations of religious freedom,” as recently mandated by the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016.

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The reports were produced under the direction of Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) Acting Assistant Secretary Virginia L. Bennett, with guidance from Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael G. Kozak, Deputy Assistant Secretary Randy W. Berry, Deputy Assistant Secretary Scott Busby, and Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia Knox Thames.


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