

# **CHINA (INCLUDES TIBET, HONG KONG, AND MACAU) 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report.

The constitution states citizens have freedom of religious belief but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities” and does not define “normal.” The government continued to exercise control over religion and restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when the government perceived these as threatening state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, according to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international media reports. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and officially permitted to hold worship services. There continued to be reports the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, detained, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices, including members of unregistered Christian churches (also known as “house churches”). Falun Gong reported dozens of its members died in detention. Although Chinese authorities continued to block information about the number of self-immolations of Tibetan Buddhists, including Buddhist monks, media reported on six self-immolations and one instance in which a man in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) committed suicide by slitting his throat. Reportedly, a Buddhist monk self-immolated in Haikou City due to a land requisition dispute involving a Buddhist temple. Multiple media outlets reported an increase in control over religious activities in advance of the 19th Party Congress in October. The government continued to cite concerns over the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), including Uighurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Hui, and Tajiks. In addition to the national Counterterrorism Law that addressed “religious extremism,” Xinjiang enacted a separate counterextremism law, effective April 1, which spelled out many of the behaviors deemed “extremist.” Authorities in Xinjiang punished university students for praying and barred them from participating in religious activities, including fasting during Ramadan. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Uighur Muslims have been forcibly sent to re-education centers, and extensive and invasive security and surveillance practices have been instituted. The government

sought the forcible repatriation of Uighur Muslims from foreign countries and detained some of those who returned, leading many to seek asylum overseas on the grounds of religious persecution. In several cases, there are reports that returnees died while in detention or disappeared. During the year, the government passed new regulations scheduled to come into effect in February 2018 to govern the activities of religious groups. Religious leaders and groups stated that the 2018 regulations would increase restrictions on their ability to practice their religions, including a new requirement for religious group members to seek approval to travel abroad and a prohibition on “accepting domination by external forces.” Christian churches stated the government increased monitoring even before the new regulations came into effect, causing many churches to cease their normal activities. Authorities continued to arrest and harass Christians in Zhejiang Province, including by requiring Christian churches to install surveillance cameras to enable daily police monitoring of their activities. An ongoing campaign of cross removals and church demolitions continued during the year, reportedly on a more limited basis than in previous years.

Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. In Xinjiang tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese continued.

The Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concern about abuses of religious freedom. On August 15, the Secretary of State said, “In China, the government tortures, detains, and imprisons thousands for practicing their religious beliefs.” He said dozens of Falun Gong members died in detention in 2016, and policies that restrict Uighur Muslims’ and Tibetan Buddhists’ religious expression increased in number. U.S. officials consistently urged the government to adhere to internationally recognized rights of religious freedom and urged the release of those imprisoned for their religious beliefs. Embassy officials met with members from diverse religious communities and protested the imprisonment of individuals on charges related to religious freedom.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 22, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under

the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (July 2017 estimate). According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), there are more than 200 million religious believers in the country. Many experts, however, believe that official estimates understate the total number of religious adherents. The U.S. government estimates there are 658 million religious believers in the country, including 251 million Buddhists, 70 million Christians, 25 million Muslims, 302 million observers of folk religions, and 10 million observers of other faiths, including Taoism. According to a February estimate by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious believers in the country, including 185-250 million Chinese Buddhists, 60-80 million Protestants, 21-23 million Muslims, 7-20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Catholics, 6-8 million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to 2016 data from the Jewish Virtual Library, the country's Jewish population is 2,600.

The *2014 Blue Book of Religions*, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a research institution directly under the State Council, reported the number of Protestants to be between 23 and 40 million. Among these, there are 20 million Protestant Christians affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches, according to information on TSPM's website in March. According to a 2014 SARA statistic, more than 5.7 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), the state-sanctioned organization for all officially recognized Catholic churches. Accurate estimates on the numbers of Catholics and Protestants as well as other faiths are difficult to calculate, however, because many adherents practice exclusively at home.

According to SARA, there are more than 21 million Muslims, with 10 ethnic minorities practicing Islam. Other sources indicate almost all of the Muslims are Sunni. The two largest Muslim ethnic minorities are Hui and Uighur, with Hui Muslims concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. SARA estimates the Muslim Hui population at 10.6 million. Uighur Muslims live primarily in the XUAR. The State Council's *2015 White Paper on Xinjiang* reports Hui, Kazakh, Kyrgyz,

Uighur, and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities constitute 14.63 million residents in Xinjiang, 63 percent of the total population.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by branch, the vast majority of Buddhists in China are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, according to the Pew Research Center.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated there were 70 million adherents. Falun Gong sources estimate that tens of millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates 7-20 million practitioners.

Some ethnic minorities retain traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Media sources report Tibetan Buddhism is growing in popularity among the Han Chinese population.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution states citizens have “freedom of religious belief,” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities.” The constitution does not define “normal.” It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution provides for the right to hold or not to hold a religious belief, and states that state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.” The law does not allow legal action to be taken against the government on the basis of the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate a citizen's religious freedom.

CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practice. Members found to belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and membership is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career. These restrictions also apply to retired CCP cadres and party members.

Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations,” and those belonging to them can receive sentences of up to life in prison. There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. A national security law explicitly bans “cult organizations.” The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other such organizations. The government continues to ban Falun Gong, the Guanyin Method religious group (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), and Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline). The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, The Church of Almighty God (also known as Eastern Lightning), Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Lord God religious group, Established King Church, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Family of Love, and South China Church.

The Counterterrorism Law describes “religious extremism” as the ideological basis of terrorism that uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred, or discrimination, or advocate violence.” Xinjiang has its own counterterrorism law containing similar provisions regarding “religious extremism” as the national law. Xinjiang also enacted a separate counterextremism law, which took effect April 1. The law bans the wearing of long beards, full-face coverings, giving “abnormal” names to children, expanding halal practice beyond food, and “interfering” with family planning, weddings, funerals, or inheritance, among other provisions.

Regulations require religious groups to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. These five associations operate under the direction of the CCP United Front Work Department. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. The government does not recognize Judaism. The country’s laws and policies do not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

All religious organizations are required to register with SARA or its provincial and local offices. Registered religious organizations are allowed to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations. According to

regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization's historical background, members, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and government sponsor, often a "patriotic religious association." According to SARA, there are more than 360,000 clergy, 140,000 places of worship, and 5,500 registered religious groups in the country.

Religious regulations also vary by province; many provinces updated their regulations during the year following the National Work Conference on Religion in April.

In September the State Council issued revisions to the 2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA), scheduled to take effect on February 1, 2018. These revised regulations will allow members of unregistered religious groups to seek approval from authorities to participate in religious activities. Individuals who do not participate in religious activities through a registered organization or those that have not been approved by authorities will be considered to have engaged in "illegal religious activities," and doing so carries potential criminal or administrative penalties. The revisions will require religious groups to register with the government, increase penalties for conducting or "providing facilities" for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions, including a new requirement for members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and a prohibition on "accepting domination by external forces." The revisions include new registration requirements for religious schools. They also place new restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments. Additionally, the revisions require that religious activity "must not harm national security." While the current regulations stipulate the obligations of religious groups to abide by the law and safeguard national unity, the new revisions specify steps to take strong measures on "religious extremism." The new regulations also place limits on the online activities of religious groups, requiring activities to be approved by the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau.

In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments permit certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces. The government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as "cultural heritage" rather than religious practice.

The government and the Holy See do not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican has no representative in the country. The CPA does not recognize the authority of the Holy See to appoint Catholic bishops. The Regulation on the

Election and Consecration of Bishops requires candidate bishops to pledge publicly support for the CCP.

SARA states through a policy posted on its website that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government.

According to the law, inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious beliefs while in custody.

Tibetan Buddhists in the country, including outside the TAR, are not free to venerate the Dalai Lama openly. While there is no public law expressly forbidding it, authorities view as suspect any display of the Dalai Lama's photo by businesses or individuals and treat those seen as loyal to him as a separatist threat.

Proselytizing in public or meeting in unregistered places of worship is not permitted.

Religious and social regulations permit official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities, such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP's United Front Work Department, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations.

An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Supreme People's Court published in November 2016 criminalize the act of forcing others to wear "extremist" garments. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols are considered "extremist." Regulations in Urumqi, Xinjiang, prohibit residents from wearing veils that cover the face, forbid residents from homeschooling children, and forbid men from growing "abnormal beards." A separate regulation approved by the Xinjiang People's Congress Standing Committee in 2016 bans the practice of religion in government buildings and the wearing of clothes associated with "religious extremism."

In February authorities in Xinjiang defined 26 religious activities, including some practices of Islam, Christianity, and Tibetan Buddhism, as illegal without government authorization. These regulations, which came into force April 1, stipulate that no classes, scripture study groups, or religious studies courses may be

offered by any group or institution without prior government approval. No religious group is permitted to carry out any religious activities, including preaching, missionary work, proselytizing, and ordaining clergy, without government approval. The pronouncement forbids the designation of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist teachers without government approval. It also bans editing, translation, publication, printing, reproduction, production, distribution, sale, and dissemination of religious publications and audiovisual products without authorization.

National printing regulations restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated, and unauthorized publishing houses closed. The government allows some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure must consult with its local Bureau of Religious Affairs (administered by SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition must agree to rebuild the structure or provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

National regulations permit parents to instruct children under the age of 18 in the beliefs of officially recognized religious groups, and children may participate in religious activities. Xinjiang officials, however, require minors to complete nine years of compulsory education before they may receive religious education outside of school. Also in Xinjiang, regulations forbid minors from participating in religious activities and impose penalties on organizations and individuals who “organize, entice, or force” minors to participate in religious activities. According to press reports, a regulation in effect since November 2016 further bans any form of religious activity in Xinjiang schools and stipulates parents or guardians who “organize, lure, or force minors into religious activities” may be stopped by anyone and reported to police. The new Xinjiang law also amends its regional version of the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law to require children taking part in religious activities go to “specialized schools for correction.” In April Xinjiang authorities banned naming children with any name having an Islamic connotation,



and in June stated all children under the age of 16 with such names must change their names.

The teaching of atheism in schools is mandated, and a CCP directive provides guidance to universities on how to prevent foreign proselytizing of university students.

The law states job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on factors including religious belief.

Birth limitation policies stating all married couples may have no more than two children, with no exceptions for ethnic or religious minorities, remain in force.

The law currently permits domestic NGOs, including religious organizations, to receive donations in foreign currency. The law requires documented approval by SARA of donations from foreign sources to domestic religious groups of more than one million renminbi (RMB) (\$154,000). This amount is expected to change in February 2018 with the implementation of the new religious regulations that will require government approval for donations of more than 100,000 RMB (\$15,400).

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With respect to Macau, the national government notified the UN Secretary General, in part, that residents of Macau shall not be restricted in the rights and freedoms they are entitled to, unless otherwise provided for by law, and in case of restrictions, the restrictions shall not contravene the ICCPR. With respect to Hong Kong, the national government notified the secretary general, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

## **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph:* Throughout the country, there continued to be reports of deaths in detention of religious adherents as well as reports the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. Religious affairs officials and security organs scrutinized and restricted the religious activities of registered and unregistered religious groups, including assembling for religious worship, expressing religious beliefs in public and in private, teaching youth, and publishing religious texts. Falun Gong reported that dozens of its members died in detention.

Reportedly, a Buddhist monk self-immolated in January in Haikou City, due to a land requisition dispute involving a Buddhist temple. International media reported an increase in control over religious activities in advance of the 19th Party Congress in October. Religious leaders and groups stated the 2018 regulations would increase restrictions on their ability to practice their religions, including a new requirement for religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and a prohibition on “accepting domination by external forces.” The government continued to cite concerns over the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Muslims in Xinjiang, including Uighurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Hui, and Tajiks. The government’s repression of religious freedom remained most severe in Xinjiang and in Tibetan areas, according to media and NGO sources. According to reports, the government continued to extract unpaid labor, conduct indoctrination sessions, and closely monitor and restrict the movements of Uighurs to counteract what it considered “religious extremism” in Xinjiang.

According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong-affiliated organization, during the year 42 practitioners died in custody or following release from prison due to injuries sustained while in custody. *Minghui* reported Han Hongxia died in March while in police custody. Officials of the Da’an City Domestic Security Office in Jilin Province arrested her in October 2016. Guards at the Baicheng City Detention Center reportedly tortured her for refusing to renounce her beliefs in Falun Gong. *Minghui* also reported that Falun Gong practitioner Yang Yuyong died in July in police custody. Authorities in Tianjin arrested him in December 2016. He reportedly suffered severe abuse while in custody, including sexual abuse involving 13 inmates who pinched his genitals and bit his nipples. By the time authorities took him to receive medical care, he was already suffering complete organ failure. His family reported his body as being black and blue and having traces of bamboo sticks under his toenails. Yang’s wife, Meng Xianzhen, was arrested with him and remained in custody at year’s end.

On January 10 in Haikou City, Hainan Province, Buddhist monk Shi-Wu Zong self-immolated and died in front of witnesses from the local ethnic and religious affairs bureau as well as officials from the social stability office. *Bowen Press* said his action was due to a land requisition dispute. Since the end of 2016, Shi-Wu Zong had protested an alleged illegal land transaction between government authorities and a local real estate developer. The real estate contractor hired workers to demolish a Buddhist temple to make way for new construction. Authorities accused Shi-Wu Zong of criminal disturbance of social order before he self-immolated.

On June 15, Radio Free Asia reported ethnic Kazakh Imam Akmet (one name only) died on June 4 in police custody in Xinjiang. According to sources in the region, authorities had detained him a week before for unknown reasons and said he had hanged himself. Sources reported authorities detained more than 100 of his supporters who spoke out about his death online. Earlier in the year, Radio Free Asia also reported that a Kaba (Habahe) County court sentenced an ethnic Kazakh Imam Okan (one name only) to 10 years in prison for performing traditional funeral prayers in accordance with Islamic customs.

According to July articles by ChinaAid and in *Express*, TSPM Nanle County Church Pastor Zhang Shaojie's daughter said authorities beat him nearly to death after he appealed his 12-year sentence following four years of imprisonment. Zhang's relatives said prison guards had tortured him, using methods including sleep deprivation as well as slowly starving him by giving him very little to eat. Zhang is a pastor in Xinxiang, Henan Province, in prison for "swindling" and "assembling a crowd to disrupt public order" for leading a group of Christians to Beijing to file a petition concerning his church's land dispute with local officials.

In January *The South China Morning Post* and Radio Free Asia reported Christian Pastor Yang Hua (also known as Li Guozhi) of the unofficial Livingstone Church in Guizhou Province was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for divulging state secrets. The documents in question reportedly concerned a "crackdown" on his church. Authorities detained the pastor in 2015, and he spent more than a year in jail prior to his sentencing. Yang's lawyers said authorities tortured him, did not treat his serious medical conditions, and threatened to kill him and his family. In late August authorities fined the Livingstone Church seven million RMB (\$1.1 million) for illegally establishing a religious space. Pastor Su Tianfu and lawyer Huang Sha filed an application with the Guiyang Municipal Ethnic and Religious Committee requesting reconsideration of the decision. In 2016, authorities arrested Su and released him pending trial, but security services continued to follow him and pressured him to plead guilty to disclosing state secrets and to relinquish to the government the space the church purchased. Authorities released church deacon Zhang Xiuhong in August on a five-year suspended sentence. Reportedly, authorities targeted church leaders because they were unwilling to register the church under the TSPM. Authorities had previously shut down the church in 2015.

In a May court hearing, a judge ordered prosecutors to gather further evidence in the case of Chen Huixia, a Falun Gong practitioner in Hebei Province charged with "using an evil cult to undermine law enforcement." Amnesty International said

detention center officials tortured her and held her without access to family or lawyers since 2016.

According to Christian NGO ChinaAid and religious groups, as part of the government's ongoing campaign of "Sinicization," religious organizations reported a continued increase in detentions and arrests, especially of those not affiliated with a government-backed patriotic association. The most common charges included "illegal religious activities" and "disrupting social stability."

Multiple media outlets reported an increase in authorities' control over religious activities in advance of the 19th Party Congress in October. These controls included detaining persons for participating in religious rituals outside of officially sanctioned religious sites, arresting persons for disturbing public order, and increasing surveillance of religious sites and communities.

Human rights groups said the vague definition of "terrorism" and "religious extremism" in the Counterterrorism Law that took effect in 2016 and in the revised religious regulations that are scheduled to come into force in 2018 could be used to criminalize peaceful expressions of religious belief. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities, according to human rights organizations. It remained difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those pursuing political goals, the right to worship, or criminal acts.

The Political Prisoner Database maintained by human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation contained the following number of religious prisoners at year's end: 308 Protestants, 277 Almighty God Church members, 107 Muslims, 30 Buddhists, and nine Catholics, compared with 207 Protestants, 366 Almighty God Church members, 66 Muslims, 21 Buddhists, and 23 Catholics at the end of 2016. The Political Prisoner Database listed 3,516 Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned at year's end, compared with 3,322 at the end of 2016. Dui Hua defined religious prisoners as "people persecuted for holding religious beliefs that are not officially sanctioned."

Falun Gong reported significantly higher numbers of its members being arrested and sentenced, stating on *Minghui* authorities sentenced almost 1,000 practitioners to imprisonment during the year for practicing Falun Dafa. During the year, authorities arrested and charged at least 50 persons with "using an evil cult to undermine law enforcement." International Falun Gong-affiliated NGOs and international media reported detentions of Falun Gong practitioners continued to

increase around “sensitive” dates. Authorities instructed neighborhood communities to report Falun Gong members to officials and offered monetary rewards to citizens who informed on Falun Gong practitioners.

Radio Free Asia reported authorities in Burultokay (Fuhai) County, Xinjiang, sentenced ethnic Kazakh Manat Hamit to 16 years in prison on an ethnic hatred charge at a May secret trial after authorities found audio files of Quranic recitations on his computer. Authorities reportedly refused to provide his family information regarding his trial and did not accept the lawyer hired for his appeal, which a court rejected in July.

According to ChinaAid as reported by *The Christian Post* in January, individuals reportedly connected to the government beat a group of Christians from Fuxing Church in Hebei Province after the church refused local officials’ pressure to sign a land transfer that would remove the congregation from the space. Several of the Christians were subsequently hospitalized.

In January authorities detained more than 80 Christians affiliated with the Protestant house church network Fangcheng Fellowship across Xinjiang Province for worshipping in house churches, according to *The Christian Post*. Some of those arrested were charged with “engaging in religious activities at nonreligious sites.”

According to *The Christian Post*, local authorities in Xinjiang arrested Ma Huichao in January for holding a Bible study in her home. They charged her with “gathering a crowd to disturb public order” and sentenced her to three years in prison. In October Radio Free Asia reported that Xinjiang authorities had detained three grandchildren of Qurban Barat, a deceased ethnic Uighur imam in Hotan (Hetian) Prefecture. Authorities charged them with “religious violations” and possession of illegal religious material, sentencing two to six years in prison and the third to five and a half years. They had given a fourth grandson an eight-year prison sentence in 2015 for the same charges.

In January authorities formally arrested Pastor Gu “Joseph” Yuese, the former pastor of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, one of the country’s largest TSPM churches, on embezzlement charges his supporters said authorities fabricated to punish him for publicly opposing Zhejiang’s cross demolition campaign. On December 24, prosecutors withdrew the charges and released Gu. Authorities barred him from returning to his pastoral duties after his release. This was the second time authorities detained Gu on embezzlement charges in as many

years. In January 2016 authorities had removed Gu from his pastoral duties and placed him under criminal detention for suspected embezzlement of church funds, but released him on bail in March 2016.

According to ChinaAid, authorities jailed five Christians in March in Liaoning Province and subsequently sentenced them to three to seven years in prison for buying and selling “officially forbidden Christian devotional books.” Although their church, Chaoguang Village Christian Gathering Place, is officially registered with the TSPM, authorities said they were conducting illegal business because they intended to make a profit from their activities. Authorities closed the church.

ChinaAid said police detained two Christians, Zhou Jinxia from Dalian, Liaoning Province, and Shi Xinhong from Bengbu, Anhui Province, after they attempted to pray at the Great Hall of the People at the beginning of the National People’s Congress on March 5. Authorities detained Zhou for 10 days in 2016 for holding religious signs outside CCP headquarters.

In March authorities detained at least 14 members of a 90-member house church in Langzhong City, Sichuan Province, for 15 days. According to ChinaAid, authorities also confiscated items belonging to the house church. Police charged the members with the crime of “illegal congregation.”

In April authorities in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, briefly detained a group of Christian worshippers and Taiwan Pastor Xu Rongzhang for singing a Christian song – an activity authorities said was illegal. According to ChinaAid, police released Xu the same day, but kept his identification for a two more days. Police forced the local Christians to write letters of confession and told Xu not to hold gatherings of more than 10 persons.

According to a Voice of America report, after ISIS in Pakistan killed two Chinese missionaries sometime in May or June, Chinese authorities reportedly detained four church leaders from Zhejiang Province who had assigned the two to travel overseas. The families of the missionaries said after the arrest the government used their killings to suppress underground churches and Christians in the area. Civil society reported authorities told the families of the missionaries they should feel shame for how the negative publicity from the killings affected the country’s international image.

According to ChinaAid, police arrested Pastor Chen Shixin of Caili Church in Anhui Province in May and detained him for one month before formally charging

him with “intentionally sabotaging public and private property.” On November 29, Chen pleaded innocent at his trial. During the trial, the prosecution said Chen damaged trees on a plot of land belonging to persons from the neighboring village. Chen said the land belonged to his church.

*The Telegraph* and BBC reported that in June authorities detained 18 suspected members of The Church of Almighty God (also known as Eastern Lightning), regarded by the government as an illegal demonic cult. In August 2016 authorities in Anhui Province detained 36 members of the group, accusing them of creating and distributing video content for the group.

According to ChinaAid, in July Guangdong police detained Pastor Tang Lili of Renyi, a five-year-old Protestant house church mainly serving migrant workers in a village in Jiangmen’s Xinhui District, and shut down the church. Police later searched Tang’s apartment and confiscated all religious items.

According to press reports, nearly every week government-backed groups in Ezhou, Hubei Province, harassed Christian house church members who met outdoors after local authorities confiscated the chairs and desks of their former indoor space on January 10. Also in January, according to ChinaAid, authorities detained six women from the church, including Hao Zhiwei, one of the church’s pastors, and a court sentenced each to 10 to 15 days of detention on charges of organizing unauthorized religious activities. Hao told Radio Free Asia reporters on August 14 authorities detained four Christians and beat them for five to seven days. On August 22, the government-backed groups beat five or six of the church members. Attackers dumped buckets of mud on the Christians, shot firecrackers at them, and beat one woman unconscious. One of the attackers reportedly told the church members, “Beating people up is my job.” Local police reportedly refused to intervene to stop the attackers or to press charges. In December 2016 local authorities warned the house church members their group violated the Regulation on Religious Affairs because it organized religious activities without the government’s approval, and said they should cease their religious activities.

In Shanxi Province, dozens of Catholics reportedly sustained injuries in August when trying to block bulldozers from destroying their church building, which belonged to the local diocese, part of the officially recognized CCPA. Local officials announced the church and surrounding plaza would be demolished “to enrich the life of the people,” despite the issuance of formal appeals by parishioners, according to news reports.

In September authorities in Sichuan Province prevented “unofficial” Protestant house Pastor Wang Yi from traveling to Hong Kong. Wang said border guards had told him that he was detained because he represented a “threat to national security,” according to Radio Free Asia.

In September authorities in Zhejiang Province arrested Pastor Xu Shizhen, along with her daughter and three-year-old grandson, after the women performed religious services in public parks and squares, according to *Christianity Today*. Reports from October indicated that Xu and her daughter were transferred to other facilities while the grandson was held at the police station. Christian advocates reported Xu and her daughter’s whereabouts remained unknown. Authorities seized Xu’s former church in 2012 and handed it over to the government-sanctioned church.

The Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) reported Father Lu Danhua of Lishui Diocese of eastern Zhejiang Province went missing on December 29. UCAN said officials of SARA took him from a priests’ dormitory and, according to a witness, the officials said they were going for a brief chat. On December 30, the witness went to SARA’s office where officials said they already released Lu, but he remained missing and his mobile phone unanswered at the end of the year. A source told UCAN that authorities had said Lu needed to go to Wenzhou for “re-education” on new religious regulations scheduled to come into effect in February 2018.

On August 9, Radio Free Asia reported there was no sign of ethnic Kazakh Imam Nurjan Mehmet whose expected release from prison was July 31. According to sources in the region, authorities had arrested him in August 2016 when a Muslim couple registering their marriage said he led a traditional Muslim *nikah* wedding ceremony for them. A source said, “This may be a local policy unique to Xinjiang. You have to first apply for a marriage certificate and then carry out the Islamic practice of *nikah*. The imams aren’t allowed to perform *nikah* if there is no marriage certificate, or they will be sent to prison.” Reports said Mehmet was serving a four-year jail term instead of the original one-year sentence.

According to Radio Free Asia, sources estimated authorities in Xinjiang detained hundreds of ethnic minority Kazakhs in the months leading up to December for “extremist” behavior that included normal Islamic practices. In December Radio Free Asia reported authorities in Xinjiang detained five Kazakhs for disseminating “terrorist audio and video” online. A regional official of the Cyberspace Administration said they detained 37-year-old Wu (full names not provided) on



November 1 for possessing “terrorist video” materials on a cellular phone, 31-year-old Zhu for “making comments that promote ethnic divisions,” and 26-year-old “A,” 36-year-old Ye, and 26-year-old Tuo for “incitement to ethnic hatred.” Radio Free Asia said regional officials had recently investigated 10 similar cases in which they detained suspects for “promoting, storing, and disseminating text, images, audio, and video related to terrorist violence, religious extremism, ethnic separatism, and false rumors.” Radio Free Asia said authorities detained six Uighurs on similar charges in November.

Authorities reportedly continued to harass and detain human rights lawyers defending religious adherents, often forbidding client meetings and threatening revocation of their professional licenses. During the year, authorities tried and convicted several prominent Christian legal rights activists and lawyers on charges of subversion of state power. Authorities also harassed or detained the family members, including children, of religious leaders and religious freedom activists. Authorities placed some of the family members under travel bans, restricting their movement.

Police in Jiangmen, Guangzhou Province, arrested human rights activist and Catholic Church member He Lin after he participated in a seaside memorial for human rights activist Liu Xiaobo on July 19. According to He Lin, authorities offered to release him if he were willing to sign a “repentance statement.” Lin refused the offer and told his lawyer he would rather sit in jail than violate his faith by signing a false statement.

In September police detained human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who had defended members of religious groups, including Christians and Falun Gong members. Gao had previously released a memoir published in Taiwan detailing reported abuses he had suffered during six years of harassment from authorities, including abductions, followed by five years of detention and physical abuse in prison, such as beatings to his face with an electric baton. Gao and his family said that after his release in 2014, government agents continued to subject him to intrusive visits at home and deny him permission to travel for medical treatment.

Relations between the Vatican and the government reportedly improved early in the year before stagnating, while media and observers reported many cases of authorities surveilling, harassing, and detaining unregistered bishops and priests.

In January overseas media reported the Shanghai chapter of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) announced Shanghai Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma

Daqin as a “supplemental member” of its executive committee, but listed him as “Father Ma Daqin” – not as a bishop. Ma reportedly remained under house arrest in Sheshan Seminary after resigning from the CCPA during his episcopal ordination in 2012. In 2016, there were reports that Ma had written a blog post saying it was a mistake to leave the CCPA.

According to several news sources, in April, before Catholics marked Holy Week, security officials took Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin away from his Wenzhou Diocese, marking the fourth time authorities detained him since September 2016. Authorities in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, originally detained Shao, whom the Vatican recognized but who was not a member of the CCPA, in 2016 to prevent him from assuming control of Wenzhou Diocese following the death of Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang. In September a photo of Shao in a Beijing hospital began circulating on social media. According to overseas media, the photo was taken at Beijing Tongren Hospital where the bishop was to have ear surgery. In October prior to the start of the Communist Party’s 19th Party Congress in Beijing, authorities moved Shao to Xining in Qinghai Province in the west of the country. Media reports said authorities pressured Shao to sign an agreement stating that he would support SARA and the state’s authority to appoint bishops, but Shao reportedly did not agree with the terms. According to reports, authorities continued to detain him at year’s end.

In Fujian Province, AsiaNews reported “underground” Catholic Bishop Guo Xijin was missing for a few days after meeting with authorities from the Religious Affairs Office on April 6. According to AsiaNews, the head of public security in Ningde said the Bishop “needs to study and learn” and would remain in custody for 20 days. Guo’s followers said he might have been pressured into joining the government-affiliated CCPA.

*The Catholic Herald* reported authorities raided an “underground” Catholic Mass at a community hall in Heilongjiang Province on April 20 to prevent an “illegal religious activity.” Videos taken at the scene showed police attempting to arrest the parish priest and the community’s lay preacher, as well as arguing with parishioners.

According to the UCAN, on September 17, a court in Gaizhou City, Liaoning Province, sentenced Catholic priest Fei Jisheng to 18 months’ imprisonment for stealing funds from a charity money box at a home for the elderly. The trial was not public, and court records were unavailable. Authorities had arrested or detained Fei multiple times in 2016 for conducting religious work outside his own

diocese. In October 2016 authorities detained Fei on charges of stealing charity funds. Catholic community members said the real reason for his arrest was due to his work with the Apostolic Class, an illegal evangelical Christian organization. Authorities released Fei after five weeks of detention and a week of ideological retraining. Fei hired a local lawyer after his arrest, but the lawyer reportedly quit due to pressure from local authorities. Local sources stated Liaoning police authorities planned to punish Fei severely to regain the trust of the central government, which was lost when local authorities failed to stop a large underground gathering of Catholics in 2015.

While authorities officially abolished “re-education through labor camps” in 2013, advocacy groups and international media continued to report some camps had been relabeled and continued to house members of religious and spiritual groups.

In Xinjiang human rights groups and others reported hundreds of thousands of Uighur Muslims were forcibly sent to re-education camps, and extensive and invasive security and surveillance practices were instituted. According to Human Rights Watch, restrictions on religious dress and expression came into effect in April along with restrictions on giving children names with religious connotations. Authorities increasingly restricted travel for religious purposes, and continued to bar Uighur children from participating in religious activities. Radio Free Asia reported that officials stayed with some families for up to 15 days during Ramadan to ensure they did not fast or pray.

Authorities in Xinjiang implemented a campaign to force Uighur Muslims returning from abroad into re-education camps. According to Radio Free Asia, the director of public security in Korla’s Qara Yulghun village said those in the camps had to express appropriate remorse for traveling abroad before authorities allowed them to return to “general re-education” studies, and eventually allowed them to leave. Other reports said officials in Hotan (Hetian), largely populated by Uighurs, confirmed that higher authorities gave them a target of sending nearly half the area’s residents to re-education camps throughout Xinjiang. Many of these camps have been registered as “career development centers” to circumvent legal problems. Reports indicated authorities sent Muslims and some Christians from ethnic minority groups to re-education.

The government continued to seek the forcible return of thousands of Uighur Muslims living outside the country, many of whom had sought asylum from religious persecution, according to human rights organizations. The government continued to claim that Uighurs were criminals and not refugees, and some

countries, including Egypt, complied with the government's requests for the forcible return of Uighur asylum seekers.

Government authorities focused forced repatriation efforts on Uighur religious students studying at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. *The Financial Times* reported Chinese government officials sent these students messages in May telling them to return home. Authorities arrested some of the students' families in China in an attempt to compel them to return. Since July the Egyptian police reportedly arrested more than 200 Uighur students in Cairo, and the Egyptian government repatriated at least 22 to China.

Uighur Islamic scholar and professor Dr. Hebibulla Tohti received a 10-year prison sentence in May. According to Radio Free Asia, authorities compelled him to return from study in Egypt in 2016 to register with authorities in Xinjiang. Authorities said he conducted illegal activities by teaching religion to Uighur students in Egypt without approval, participating in a religious conference in Saudi Arabia without approval, and emphasizing the distinctive nature of Uighur culture in his doctoral dissertation. The government-sanctioned China Islamic Association provided financial support for his graduate studies and previously lauded his work publicly.

Radio Free Asia reported in November that authorities in some parts of Xinjiang had recently issued orders for ethnic Kazakh Chinese nationals to hand in their passports and Kazakh residence permits. Reportedly, authorities detained hundreds of ethnic Kazakhs returning from overseas study or family visits to Kazakhstan and sent them for indefinite terms to "re-education" facilities. One ethnic Kazakh in Tekes County said authorities placed him on a "wanted" list, along with some 60 other ethnic Kazakhs, for "returning to China after a long absence."

According to *Minghui*, authorities continued to successfully force some prisoners and detainees to recant their beliefs, particularly Falun Gong practitioners, whom the government reportedly subjected to "transformation through re-education." Authorities also failed to provide prisoners with adequate access to religious materials, facilities, or clergy. Prison authorities reportedly subjected detained Falun Gong practitioners to various methods of physical and psychological coercion, such as sleep deprivation, in attempts to force them to renounce their beliefs.

Religious groups continued to report the CCP interfered in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice in “patriotic religious associations.” Local authorities pressured religious believers to affiliate with patriotic associations and used administrative detention, including confinement and abuse in administrative detention centers, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups. Patriotic religious associations regularly reviewed sermons and sometimes required church leaders to attend education sessions with religious bureau officials. They also closely monitored and sometimes blocked the ability of religious leaders to meet freely with foreigners.

Due to the difficulty of fulfilling registration requirements, many religious organizations remained either unregistered or registered as commercial enterprises. Unregistered groups reported they were vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by SARA, the Ministry of Public Security, and other party or government security organs. In some areas local authorities allowed or at least did not interfere with the activities of some unregistered groups, while in other areas, local officials restricted events and meetings, confiscated and destroyed property, physically assaulted and injured participants, or imprisoned leaders and worshippers, according to reports.

SARA continued to maintain statistics on registered religious groups. According to statistics released in February, there were 21 officially recognized Protestant seminaries, 48,000 pastors, and 56,000 churches and other meeting places. According to civil society, there were 12 CPA seminaries; however, the government was reportedly in the process of closing the ones in Shanghai and Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Although there were two CPA seminaries in Beijing, civil society regarded one of them to be primarily used as the CPA’s propaganda for international visitors. There were 72 CPA-affiliated Catholic bishops, eight of whom the Vatican did not recognize, and three of those eight were excommunicated. An outside source estimated approximately 37 Catholic bishops remained independent of the CPA and continued to operate unofficially. In some locations, however, local authorities reportedly pressured unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See. SARA also estimated there were 40,000 mosques, 50,000 imams, and 10 Quran Institutes.

It remained unclear how strictly authorities would enforce the revised RRA. Some experts noted while the text of the revisions appeared to indicate a harsher line towards religious activity, the last revision of the RRA was in 2005, and thus the revisions could serve to formalize policies and practices already in place, in addition to adding new regulations.

The government did not recognize house or unregistered churches, and continued to closely monitor their activities. Some officials reportedly still denied the existence of house churches or unregistered churches. Although SARA declared family and friends had the right to worship together at home – including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government – authorities still regularly harassed and detained small groups that did so.

Officials across Zhejiang Province forcibly entered churches to install “antiterrorism” surveillance cameras, according to Radio Free Asia and *The South China Morning Post*. In some cases where church followers resisted, officials cut off water and electricity to the churches. Authorities beat some of those who resisted to the extent that they required hospitalization. The churches targeted for installation of cameras were often the same ones previously targeted for removal of unapproved crosses.

More than 10 government officials broke up a group of Christians praying at Olive Church in Guangdong Province on March 19 and accused the congregation of conducting religious activities without legal authorization. ChinaAid reported the police detained approximately 20 church members, releasing them later that day. ChinaAid also reported public security and religious affairs bureaus combined forces to target Huaqiangbei Bible Guizheng Church in Shenzhen during the year, confiscating church property. In response, the congregation dispersed to several satellite locations.

On April 20, police raided the Buji Church in Shenzhen, stating the church was operating illegally, detained Zhang Rongxian – the wife of Pastor Zhang Fei – and interrogated her for 15 hours. The police also conducted frequent fire inspections of church facilities and pressured the property owner to evict the pastor and his wife, according to ChinaAid.

ChinaAid reported on several actions in May. On May 3, Dongguan local police raided the Zhong Fu Wan Min “underground” Catholic Church during its worship service, which two U.S. citizens attended. Police took 30 congregants in for questioning. Authorities released them the next day. Police officers beat Pastor Li Peng at the church and kept him in custody at the local police station. ChinaAid reported this was the second time in a year local police raided the Zhong Fu Wan Min Church.

On May 4, the “underground” Guang Fu Church’s landlord requested the church to move out of one of its locations in Baiyun District, Guangzhou. Local police also denied Pastor Ma Ke and some of his church members’ applications for residency permits.

On May 12, in Xiamen, local authorities banned the River of Life Berean Church and the Berean Research Institute of Theology, accusing them of having Korean connections and setting up illegal religious meeting places. The local Huli District Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau also confiscated 1,345 yuan (\$210) donated to the church, claiming it was illegal income.

On July 26, officials from the Guangzhou Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau summoned Ma Ke, Pastor of Guangfu Church, to the police station and told him the church could either become a member of the TSPM church or consent to “special personnel” monitoring the congregation. The pastor refused the first option, citing a belief that house churches and TSPM churches followed a different theology. The pastor said Guangfu Church had been a constant target of government harassment and surveillance over the past few years.

Security officials frequently interrupted the outdoor services of the unregistered Shouwang Church in Beijing and detained individuals attending services for several days without charge. Security services continued to closely monitor and harass church Pastor Jin Tianming, according to reports from advocacy groups.

Despite an overall tightening in spaces for unregistered churches to operate, in some areas, members of unregistered churches said they had more freedom than in the past to conduct religious services, as long as they gathered only in private and kept congregation numbers low. In some areas, however, authorities shut down churches that tried to maintain a low profile. Some unregistered churches reported authorities harassed and pressured their landlords to break property leases with the churches. Civil society reported authorities in one city forbade vacation Bible sessions for children during school breaks – a change from the previous year, while authorities refused to allow weekend religious education programs in numerous other cities across the country.

Churches nationwide continued to report stricter requirements on sermon content, design of buildings, and management of finances. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations.

In Xinjiang, the government continued to cite concerns over the “three evils” as a reason to enact and enforce repressive measures against the religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Authorities typically characterized these operations as targeting “separatists” or “terrorists.” Police raids and restrictions on Islamic practices were part of “strike hard” campaigns, which began in 2014 and continued throughout the year. Local observers said, however, many incidents related to pressure on Uighurs went unreported to international media or NGOs.

Radio Free Asia reported in February that an official at the Xinjiang Religious and Ethnic Minority Affairs Bureau confirmed the government banned all Christian activities not linked to state-approved churches.

In January and February local authorities conducted a series of raids and arrests targeting Christian house churches in Xinjiang. Media reports indicated authorities used short-term administrative sentences in an attempt to pressure house church members to join government-sanctioned congregations.

On November 16, Radio Free Asia reported authorities in Tekes County, Xinjiang, searched the homes of 30,000 members of the mostly Muslim Kazakh ethnic group over several weeks, confiscating religious items they had ordered families to hand over in September.

During Ramadan in May and June, local authorities throughout Xinjiang imposed policies intended to disrupt Muslims’ observance of the fast. According to *The Independent*, these included mandatory 24-hour shifts for local government employees, the requirement that restaurants remain open during the day, and mandatory sports activities and patriotic film sessions for students on Fridays throughout the month. There were reports of authorities prohibiting university students from fasting during Ramadan.

Throughout Ramadan, authorities in Hotan (Hetian) Prefecture, Xinjiang implemented the “Together in Five Things” campaign during which authorities assigned local party cadres to stay in local residences. They observed families throughout the day and ensured they did not pray or fast. According to Radio Free Asia, an official said “During this period, [officials] will get to know the lives of the people, assist in their daily activities – such as farming – and propagate laws and regulations, party and government ethnic and religious policies, and so on.” Authorities required all Uighur cadres, civil servants, and pensioners to sign a pledge stating they would not fast and would seek to dissuade their families and friends from doing so.



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to deny international media reports stating authorities banned Uighur Muslims from Ramadan fasting, and said that religious freedom for Uighurs was guaranteed by the country's constitution. Reports published on the official websites of local governments in Xinjiang, however, indicated authorities restricted or banned certain groups of Uighurs from observing Ramadan, including CCP members, their relatives, students, and the employees of state-owned enterprises and state-run organizations, and instead hosted education events about the dangers of "religious extremism." Authorities also hosted morning sessions in order to ensure students and workers ate breakfast. Authorities ordered restaurants and grocery stores to remain open and serve alcohol during Ramadan, according to the website of the Qapqal County, Yili (Ili) Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture government.

Restrictions across Xinjiang that required worshippers to apply for mosque entry permits remained in place. Beginning in October 2016, authorities in several prefectures in Xinjiang further restricted movement by requiring residents turn their passports in to their local police station for an annual review. Ethnoreligious minorities also reported increased screening at airport, train station, and roadside security checkpoints.

The government facilitated participation in the Hajj, and Muslims applied online or through local official Islamic associations. Media reported authorities punished pilgrims attempting to perform the Hajj through routes other than government-arranged ones. Approximately 12,800 Chinese Muslims participated in the Hajj during the year, according to SARA, almost 2,000 fewer than in 2016. The China Islamic Association reported in 2016 Saudi Arabia imposed an annual quota on the number of pilgrims from China that was lower than those for other countries such as India, which was granted 175,025 during the year. Chinese state media said Xinjiang provided nearly a quarter of pilgrims, although independent sources say only 1,400 Uighur Muslims were able to participate. These figures included China Islamic Association members and security officials sent to monitor Muslim citizens and prevent unauthorized activities. Uighur Muslims reported difficulties taking part in state-sanctioned Hajj travel due to the China Islamic Association's criteria for participation in the official Hajj program. The government confiscated the passports of Uighurs in Xinjiang, and Uighurs reported near universal failure in efforts to regain possession of travel documents. Age restrictions limiting Hajj travel to Uighurs over 60 years old also reduced the number traveling to Mecca, according to media reports. Those selected to perform state-sanctioned Hajj travel were required to undergo political and religious "education," according to SARA

and media reports. Uighurs allowed to attend the Hajj were also reportedly forced to participate in political education every day during the Hajj. Organizations reported the government favored Hui Muslims over Uighur Muslims in the Hajj application process. Muslims that chose to travel outside of legal government channels reportedly often risked deportation when they tried to travel through third countries.

Radio Free Asia reported the CCP on March 23 demoted a CCP official from Chira (Cele) County, Hotan (Hetian) for her having a Muslim wedding ceremony (*nikah*) in her home. A local Han Chinese official reportedly said the majority Muslim region's regulations clearly stated weddings should not be at one's own house, and that the village party branch secretary and a specially appointed religious leader must attend, because not doing so "might promote deviant views that contradict ethnic unity and the sovereignty of the country."

Authorities continued to prevent any "illegal" religious activities in Xinjiang and prioritize Chinese language and culture over Uighur language and culture under the rubric of ethnic unity. Authorities promoted loyalty to the Communist Party as the most important value. Reportedly, authorities encouraged thousands of Uighurs to participate in ceremonies wearing traditional Han Chinese clothing, performing tai chi, and singing the national anthem.

According to media reports, in August authorities in Xinjiang arrested more than 20 ethnic Kazakh Muslim university students because they were wearing religious clothing and reciting daily prayers. Security forces closely monitored university students and forbade religious activity.

The government pressured students in northwestern Xinjiang to report information on their family's religious practices to teachers, including identifying those in the family who prayed, attended religious ceremonies, or wore a hijab or beard. Teachers conducted these surveys annually and passed them to security authorities as a means to stop religious ideology from entering schools, according to media reports.

Hui Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces continued to engage in religious practice with less government interference than did Uighurs, according to local sources. Hui Muslims reported they were free to practice as they wished with regard to family customs such as fasting during Ramadan, clothing, prayer, and performing the Hajj. They reported, however, they did not receive special accommodations for time to pray during their workday and were

not given time off for Islamic holidays. They said they were treated the same as others in their community.

SARA conducted training for Muslim leaders at the local and national levels on religious regulations and their rights under the constitution. SARA officials stated they acknowledged the importance of cultivating the talents of religious leaders to promote the country's social development.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of religious materials. The government limited distribution of Bibles to CPA and TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops, and seminaries. Individuals could not order Bibles directly from publishing houses. Members of unregistered churches reported the supply and distribution of Bibles was inadequate, particularly in rural locations. There were approximately 11 provincial TSPM Christian publishers. Authorities only allowed the national TSPM to publish the Bible legally. According to reports, while there were no independent domestic Christian booksellers, publishers not religiously-affiliated could publish Christian books. Approximately 20 distribution centers and bookstores were linked to the national TSPM. In addition, authorities reportedly allowed churches with more than 2,000 members to sell books at their church facilities. Approximately 700 churches had such bookstores. During the year, authorities continued to limit the number of Christian titles that could be published annually, with draft manuscripts closely reviewed. Authorities also restricted the ability of some bookstores to sell Christian books. Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone applications to distribute Christian materials, however, reported the government did not generally censor such materials.

As part of the ongoing "Three Illegals and One Item" campaign, international media reported authorities in Xinjiang continued to confiscate Qurans and prayer rugs as illegal religious items. The campaign also included confiscating items containing religious symbols.

On March 2, Radio Free Asia reported local police intimidated Xu Lei, the spouse of detained Guangfu Protestant Family Church member Li Hongmin, after she petitioned the government in Beijing regarding her husband's case. Xu had appealed on behalf of her husband, whom authorities charged with conducting illegal business operations for printing Bibles. Xu's landlord evicted her at the end of March.

On September 14, officials in Shangqiu County, Henan Province, shut down a Christian-run academy for youth, saying it was “brainwashing” young persons. Officials also confiscated books and seized a computer and other materials from the academy, according to ChinaAid.

In October Radio Free Asia reported Beijing authorities closed an Islamic bookstore and publishing house. They also arrested the owner, a member of the Dongxiang minority group, on terrorism charges. The publishing house specialized in the production of materials related to Hui Muslims.

The People’s High Court, Public Security Bureau, Bureau of Culture, and Bureau of Industry and Commerce in Xinjiang continued to implement restrictions on video and audio recordings the government defined as promoting terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism. Authorities prohibited dissemination of such materials on the internet, social media, and in online marketplaces. As part of these measures, police randomly stopped individuals to check their mobile phones for any sensitive content.

There were reports authorities restricted the acquisition or use of buildings for religious ceremonies and purposes. Authorities continued to arrest and harass church leaders in Zhejiang Province where the government continued to conduct its “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign, according to news reports. The campaign, which the Zhejiang provincial government announced in 2013, involved the demolition of church buildings authorities said were “illegal” structures. Christian communities reported many targeted churches had building permits and other official documents showing that the proper authorities had approved their building.

Numerous church officials, journalists, and commentators said the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign focused on demolishing buildings used by Christians. Church pastors and members of their congregations openly continued to resist official cross removals, including by forming human chains and replacing or reattaching crosses, resulting in repeated clashes and standoffs with police. Some observers estimated the government demolished as many as 2,000 crosses and buildings in Zhejiang Province since 2014 when the campaign began. *LaCroix International* reported that on September 20, local officials in Tanghe County, Henan Province, forcibly demolished the cross on top of the Holy Grace Protestant Church, an officially registered church. The cross caught on fire during the demolition. On August 3, officials in Jiangxi Province’s Shangrao City

forcibly dismantled a cross from a church that was still under construction. This was the most recent of 10 cross removals in Jiangxi, according to reports.

In January individuals in Henan Province reportedly hired by the government raided the state-recognized Dali Christian Church, locked several church officials in an office, confiscated their mobile phones and threw away their phone cards, smashed and looted church property, and demolished part of the church with a front-end loader, according to ChinaAid.

In April the Guizhou Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau reported in 2016 it shut down 79 Buddhist and Taoist congregation sites and 254 Christian congregation sites in Guizhou Province, referring to these sites as illegal establishments and operations.

According to the Catholic News Agency, on May 5, 300 police officers in Shangqiu City, Henan Province, demolished a church, beat and shoved to the ground worshippers who tried to stop the demolition, and detained 40 worshippers. Local officials referred to the church as an “illegal structure” and ordered its demolition. They also said the church had not paid a “road usage fee” demanded by other villagers. Authorities detained the church’s pastor when he tried to discuss the issue with officials.

In June the Bazhong municipal government in Sichuan Province announced it shut down 10 religious congregation sites for failure to register properly with the government in accordance with the law.

In December authorities demolished a Catholic church in Xi’an’s Huyi District, Shaanxi Province, according to Radio Free Asia. Three hundred parishioners protested the action.

The government continued to restrict religious education in institutions across the country. Muslims and Christians also reported restrictions on their ability to speak about their faith among university students; the government strictly banned meetings of student religious organizations. Local public security bureau officials regularly warned religious student groups against meeting.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning had to obtain the support of the official patriotic religious association. The government continued to require students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and political issues were included in examinations of graduates of religious

schools. Protestant representatives reported that in TSPM-controlled seminaries, officials directed faculty to engage in “theological reconstruction” to make the Protestant doctrine conform to socialism. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

*Baptist Press* reported authorities in Zhejiang and Henan provinces notified churches they forbade religious education of minors, including Sunday school and church summer camps. Henan authorities reportedly said they prohibited church summer camps due to the potential health risk of excessive heat. In August authorities notified more than 100 churches in Zhejiang Province they banned minors from entering churches or participating in religious activities.

Officials continued to hold “anticult” education sessions and propaganda campaigns affecting schoolchildren and their families. Some officials required families to sign statements guaranteeing they would not take part in unregistered churches and “cult organization” activities related to Falun Gong as a prerequisite for registering their children for school. The media reported authorities forced government employees in Xinjiang to sign guarantees they would refrain from religious or political expression. The penalty for not signing could be a ban on their children entering university or an administrative investigation of the employees.

Authorities continued to allow some patriotic religious association-approved Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and Buddhist monks to travel abroad for additional religious study. Religious workers not affiliated with a patriotic religious association stated they faced difficulties in obtaining passports or official approval to study abroad.

Official media outlets often linked the ongoing anticorruption campaign to the religious or superstitious beliefs of fallen officials. These beliefs ranged from mainstream religious beliefs to fortune telling or soothsaying.

In May officials in a rural part of Zhumadian, Henan Province, banned gatherings of a house church and accused it of being part of a cult and practicing “heresy,” according to ChinaAid.

According to human rights groups, on June 12, police officers followed Ruan Haonan, who hosted Jiangmen Fengle Church Christian gatherings in his home, and detained him and fellow church members at the local police station. Officials

interrogated them and ordered them to confess they had participated in an “evil cult” – a charge reportedly often levied against Christians for their church activities. Later that day, police forcibly entered Ruan’s apartment and arrested his pregnant wife Luo Caiyan. Police did not show her family any documents authorizing the arrest. Despite not mentioning any “cult” activities, police forced church members to sign a document as a condition of their release, asserting they participated in a cult. On July 13, police released Jiangmen Fengle Family Church Pastors Li Wanhua and Ruan Haonan on bail. On June 15, police arrested the church’s other pastor, Li Wanhua, on the charge of “sabotaging implementation of the law by organizing and using cults.”

Government policy continued to allow religious groups to engage in charitable work. Regulations specifically prohibited faith-based organizations from proselytizing while conducting charitable activities. Authorities required faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, to register with the government. Once registered as an official charity, authorities allowed them to raise funds publicly and to receive tax benefits. The government did not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government required faith-based charities to obtain official cosponsorship of the registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often required these groups to affiliate with one of the five patriotic religious associations.

Authorities allowed certain overseas faith-based aid groups to deliver services in coordination with local authorities and domestic groups. Some unregistered religious groups reported local authorities placed limits on their ability to provide social services.

Foreign residents belonging to religious groups not officially recognized by the government reported authorities permitted them to worship. According to policy, however, foreigners could not proselytize, conduct religious activities at unregistered venues, or conduct religious activities with local citizens at religious venues. In many cases, authorities prohibited citizens from attending the services of religious organizations permitted to operate for foreign residents. In some cases, authorities reportedly expelled foreign residents who attempted to conduct religious activities with Chinese citizens without government approval. Some foreign residents whose appeals for registration the government denied still met without government approval. On several occasions, police raided those meetings, with increased pressure reported during sensitive holidays.

In February international media reported authorities arrested and detained two South Korean pastors in Liaoning Province for assisting North Korean defectors in China. According to media reports, authorities also stepped up a campaign to arrest and deport Christian missionaries. Previously, authorities often issued missionaries a warning and allowed them one month to leave the country. Security services in the northeastern provinces more often arrested and detained missionaries, seizing their electronic devices as they did so, according to international media sources.

The government continued its efforts to restrict the movement of the Dalai Lama. In June the Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested the Dalai Lama's series of lectures and his commencement speech at the University of California San Diego. After the Dalai Lama's commencement speech, the China Scholarship Council announced it would no longer fund programs for visiting Chinese scholars intending to study or do research at the University of California San Diego.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Because religion, culture, and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Religious and ethnic minority groups such as Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims experienced institutionalized discrimination throughout the country because of both their religious beliefs and their status as ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultures.

Anti-Muslim speech in social media remained widespread, although in September the government announced it would censor some anti-Islamic expression on the internet. According to the *South China Morning Post*, many social media articles criticized Hui Muslims in Shadian, Yunnan Province, and said the local government was too tolerant of them. Some individuals boycotted a food delivery service that offered halal meals, according to media reports. Individuals criticized what some perceived as too favorable treatment toward Muslim populations and associated all Muslims with terrorism. National Public Radio reported a Han Chinese resident of Urumqi's suburbs as saying, without the new security measures, "each time I see a face that doesn't look like mine, I might wonder if they're terrorists from outside the country." In Xinjiang, policies discriminating against Uighurs, as well as greater access to economic opportunities for Han Chinese, exacerbated tensions between Uighur Muslims and both the Han Chinese and the government.



Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers openly discriminated against religious believers. Some Protestant Christians reported employers terminated their employment due to their religious activities. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring, lost their positions, and were detained by authorities for praying in their workplaces. There were also reports from Falun Gong practitioners that employers dismissed them for practicing Falun Gong. In some instances, landlords discriminated against potential tenants based on their religious beliefs.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. On August 15, the Secretary said, “In China, the government tortures, detains, and imprisons thousands for practicing their religious beliefs.” He said dozens of Falun Gong members died in detention in 2016 and police policies that restrict Uighur Muslims’ and Tibetan Buddhists’ religious expression increased.

Embassy officials met regularly with a range of government officials managing religious affairs, both to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance and to obtain more information on government policy on the management of religious affairs, including regarding the treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, urged government officials at the central and local levels, including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Council, to implement stronger protections for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Ambassador highlighted religious freedom in private diplomacy with senior officials. The Department of State, the embassy, and the consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including individuals imprisoned for religious reasons.

The Ambassador, the Consuls General, and other embassy and consulate general officials met with religious groups as well as academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. Embassy and consulate general officials hosted events around religious holidays and conducted roundtable discussions with religious leaders to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society and learn about issues facing religious communities. The embassy supported a number of religious leaders and scholars to participate in exchange

programs related to the role of religion and religious tolerance. The embassy arranged for the introduction of religious officials to members of U.S. religious communities and U.S. government agencies that engaged with those communities. The embassy and consulates general regularly hosted events for the public to promote understanding and tolerance, such as an academic discussion about the relationship between religion and the state, as well as events highlighting ethnoreligious minority communities.

Authorities continually harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals that did attend.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 22, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

## TIBET 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties in other provinces to be part of the People's Republic of China. The constitution of the People's Republic of China states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" without defining "normal." In the TAR and other Tibetan areas, authorities continued to engage in widespread interference in religious practices, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. There were reports of forced disappearance, physical abuse, prolonged detention without trial, and arrests of individuals due to their religious practices. Travel restrictions hindered traditional religious practices and pilgrimages. Repression increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, and the Dalai Lama's birthday, according to numerous sources. Self-immolations, which led to life-threatening injuries or even death, in protest of government policies continued, and at least six individuals set themselves on fire during the year, including two monks. Another report stated a man in Lhasa died after he slit his own throat in protest near the Jokhang Temple. As part of an ongoing multi-year project, according to local sources, during the year authorities continued to evict at least 11,500 monks and nuns from Buddhist institutes at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, destroying as many as 6,000 homes where they resided and subjecting many of them to "patriotic re-education." The government routinely denigrated the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists revere as their most important spiritual leader, and forbade Tibetans from venerating him and other religious leaders associated with him. Authorities often justified their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by claiming the religious institutions engaged in separatist or pro-independence activities, and undermined the leadership of the Communist Party of China.

Some Tibetans encountered societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, or when traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources. Because expressions of identity and religion are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religion.

The U.S. government repeatedly pressed Chinese authorities to respect religious freedom for all faiths and to allow Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. U.S. officials expressed concerns to the Chinese government at the

highest levels about the severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans' ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights. Embassy and other U.S. officials urged the Chinese government to re-examine the policies that threaten Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, including the continuing demolition campaign at the Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute. U.S. officials underscored that decisions on the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should be made solely by faith leaders. While diplomatic access to the TAR remained tightly controlled, three U.S. visits occurred: one consular visit in July and visits by the U.S. Consul General in Chengdu in April and November. U.S. officials emphasized to TAR officials during the April and November visits the importance of respecting religious freedom in Tibet. In July the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor met with the Gyalwang Karmapa to highlight continued U.S. support for religious freedom.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

According to official data from China's most recent census in November 2010, 2,716,400 Tibetans make up 90 percent of the TAR's total population. Han Chinese make up approximately 8 percent. Other ethnicities make up the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. Outside of the TAR, official census data show Tibetans constitute 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within jurisdictions of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion, and small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau who follow the Dalai Lama, and some of whom consider themselves Tibetan Buddhist. Scholars also estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, Confucianism, traditional folk religions, or profess atheism; Hui Muslims; and non-Tibetan Catholics or Protestants.

### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

## Legal Framework

The constitution of the People’s Republic of China states citizens enjoy “freedom of religious belief,” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.” The constitution also stipulates the right of citizens to believe in or not believe in any religion. Only religious groups belonging to one of five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant), however, are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

Regulations issued by the central government’s State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) codify its control over the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including reincarnate lamas. These regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated and the entities must approve reincarnations. The State Council has the right to deny the recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state that no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The government maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Within the TAR, regulations issued by SARA assert state control over all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious venues, groups, and personnel. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the government formal control over the building and management of religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

In September the central government’s State Council issued revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs, slated to take effect on February 1, 2018. The

revisions require religious groups to register with the government, increase penalties for “providing facilities” for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions, including a new requirement for religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and a prohibition on “accepting domination by external forces.” The revisions increase regulations for religious schools and place new restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments. Additionally, the revisions require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the existing regulations stipulate the obligations of religious groups to abide by the law and safeguard national unity, the new revisions specify steps to respond to “religious extremism.” The new regulations also place limits on the online activities of religious groups, requiring activities be approved by the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau.

To establish places of worship, religious organizations must receive approval from the religious affairs department of the relevant local government both when the facility is proposed and again before any services are held at that location. Religious organizations must submit dozens of documents in order to register during one or both approval processes, including detailed management plans of their religious activities, exhaustive financial records, and personal information on all staff members. Religious communities not going through the formal registration process may not legally have a set facility or worship meeting space. Therefore, each time they want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel or an apartment, they need to seek a separate approval from government authorities for each service. Worshipping in a space without pre-approval, either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity, which may be criminally or administratively punished.

The TAR government has the right to deny any individual’s application to take up religious orders. The regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or “county-level cities” within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach. Tibetan autonomous prefectures outside of the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central government level, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee’s Central Tibet Work Coordination Group, the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD), and SARA are responsible for developing religious management policies, which are carried out with support from the five “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic, Islamic, and Taoist). At

local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and the state-controlled Buddhist Association of China (BAC) are required to coordinate implementation of religious policies in monasteries, and many have stationed party cadres and government officials, including public security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas.

CCP members, including Tibetans and retired officials, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced.

### **Government Practices**

*Summary Paragraph:* Across the Tibetan Plateau there were reports of forced disappearance, physical abuse, prolonged detention, and arbitrary arrest of persons due to their religious practice, as well as forced expulsions from monasteries, restrictions on religious gatherings, and destruction of monastery-related dwellings, according to media reporting and human rights organizations. There were six cases of self-immolation and one reported suicide by other means in protest of government policies. Human rights advocates stated authorities continued to use intimidation, including collective punishment of family or community members for acts of dissent, to compel acquiescence with government regulations and to attempt to reduce the likelihood of antigovernment demonstrations, thereby projecting an image of stability and the appearance of popular support. Security forces maintained a permanent presence at some monasteries, sometimes dressing in monastic clothing. As part of an ongoing multi-year project, according to local sources, during the year authorities continued to evict at least 11,500 monks and nuns from Buddhist institutes at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, destroying as many as 6,000 homes where they resided and subjecting many of them to “patriotic re-education.” In many Tibetan areas police detained monks and laypersons who called for freedom, human rights, and religious liberty, or who expressed support for the Dalai Lama or solidarity with individuals who had self-immolated. Several monks were detained without formal criminal charges. For example, in February authorities detained Lobsang Tsultrim, a monk from Kirti Monastery, for shouting slogans supportive of Tibetan freedom and the Dalai Lama. Restrictions on religious activities were particularly severe around politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events. Tibet scholars stated the Chinese government’s ban on minors entering monasteries and nunneries and restrictions on travel of monks and nuns threatened the traditional transmission and practice of Tibetan Buddhism. According to human rights organizations,

authorities scrutinized and sought to control monastic operations and restricted travel for religious purposes, including to neighboring countries such as India and Nepal. According to reports, Bon members were subject to many of the same restrictions as Tibetan Buddhists.

As in previous years there were cases of self-immolation as a means of protest against government policies. During the year, six Tibetans reportedly self-immolated, as compared to three individuals in 2016, seven in 2015, 11 in 2014, and 26 in 2013. Some experts attributed reports of the continued relatively low number of self-immolations to tighter controls by authorities. Local authorities prosecuted and imprisoned an unknown number of Tibetans whom authorities said had aided or instigated self-immolations, including family members and friends of self-immolators, according to press reports. Authorities also reportedly took measures, including threatening anyone who shared this information with foreigners with up to 15-year prison sentences, to limit news of self-immolations and other protests from spreading within Tibetan communities and beyond. There were also numerous reports of officials shutting down or restricting local access to the internet and cellular phone services for this purpose.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and other groups reported 16-year-old Chagdor Kyab set fire to himself in Bora (Bola) Township of Xiahe (Sangchu) County, Gansu Province, in May while calling for Tibetan freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama. According to a number of local sources, following the self-immolation, prefecture police detained Chagdor's parents and other family members for interrogation and threatened them with "severe consequences" should they fail to cooperate with security officials. As of December, local sources reported authorities had released Chagdor's parents, but instructed them not to discuss the incident.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that on March 18, a 24-year-old Tibetan farmer named Pema Gyaltzen, from Nyagrang, set himself ablaze in Kardze in protest of government policies. His fate remained unclear.

RFA also reported that on April 15, another Nyagrang resident, Wangchuk Tseten, a 39-year-old father of four, set himself ablaze in Kardze. As he burned, RFA's sources said he called for a long life for the Dalai Lama. The source added there seemed to be little chance that Tseten survived.

Jamyang Losel, a 22-year-old monk at Gyerteng monastery, self-immolated on May 19, close to a hospital in Kangsta (Gangcha) county in Qinghai's Tsojang



(Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. A source cited in an RFA article said, “He did not survive his protest,” but that police who took away Losel’s body refused to give his remains to family members who requested it.

A 63-year-old Tibetan monk named Tenga, from a monastery in Kardze (Ganzi) county, reportedly died of his injuries after he set himself on fire November 26. While burning, Tenga called out for freedom for Tibet. Afterwards, there reportedly was a heavy security lockdown in the area, and Tenga’s family members in Dando village were placed under watch by Chinese police.

RFA reported that a former Kirti monastery monk named Konpe set himself ablaze on December 23. Konpe self-immolated on the main road in Ngaba, a site of numerous other self-immolations and protests calling for Tibetan freedom. Detailed information on Konpe’s identity and condition were delayed, reportedly due to a clampdown imposed by Chinese authorities in the area. Konpe was approximately 30 years old and joined the monastery as a young child but later disrobed. Konpe’s father was reportedly detained by authorities who talked to him about his son’s medical costs.

In June FreeTibet.org reported that a Tibetan man died after slitting his own throat near the Jokhang Temple in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. The man shouted “We don’t have freedom and rights” before he took his own life. Authorities referred to the event as a suicide and did not mention any form of protest.

In February Nyima Lhamo, the niece of prominent reincarnate lama political prisoner Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, testified at the 9th Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy that Chinese authorities denied her uncle a fair trial and medical parole even as his health deteriorated. Nyima Lhamo recounted what she said were mysterious circumstances leading to the Rinpoche’s death in prison in 2015 and the government’s denial of permission for his family to perform post-death Buddhist rites and for his religious order to seek his reincarnation. According to Nyima Lhamo, her family remained in Tibet until 2016, and Chinese authorities continued to harass and threaten them with prosecution for Nyima Lhamo’s continued advocacy for her late uncle. She reported other local Tibetans seeking justice for the Rinpoche were arrested and “sustained injuries from gunshots” from authorities.

The government continued to insist that Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama’s true reincarnation, and not Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars, UFWD and

Religious Affairs Bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypersons, including government officials, to attend religious study sessions presided over by Gyaltsen Norbu, including ordering every Tibetan family in Chamdo (Changdu) city to send family members to a September teaching session in order to ensure hundreds of thousands of people paid him respect. Authorities have installed Gyaltsen Norbu in Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse (Xigaze), a prefecture-level city in the TAR, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama. Chinese authorities detained Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama, who is recognized by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetans, and his parents in 1995 when he was six years old and have not responded to requests by international observers to visit him. Members of the Tibetan community inside the country and in exile consider him to be forcibly disappeared by the Chinese government, and have been unsuccessful in their attempts to visit him for more than two decades. His and his parents' whereabouts remain unknown. The Panchen Lama is the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism's second-most prominent teacher after the Dalai Lama.

The government continued to exercise its authority over the approval of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and the supervision of their religious education. In addition, authorities closely supervised the education of many key young reincarnate lamas. In a deviation from traditional custom, government officials, rather than religious leaders, continued to manage the selection of the reincarnate lamas' religious and lay tutors in the TAR and some other Tibetan areas. Religious leaders reported as part of the interference by authorities in reincarnate lamas and monks' religious education, authorities were incentivizing these young men to voluntarily disrobe by emphasizing the attributes of secular life as compared to the more disciplined and austere religious life. These and other interferences continued to cause concern to religious leaders about the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations. According to media reports, as of December, the government added seven additional "living buddhas" below the age of 16 to last year's list of more than 1,300 approved "living buddhas." The new additions continued to undergo training on patriotism and the Chinese Communist Party's socialist political system. The BAC announced its database of 1,311 "living buddhas" that it deemed "authentic" was nearly complete. Neither the Dalai Lama nor Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was on the list.

The government placed restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions. According to local sources, at Larung Gar, Kardze (Ganzi), Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, site of the world's largest Tibetan Buddhist institute, during the year the government evicted approximately 9,000 monks and nuns from a population that was at least 20,000 in 2016, and demolished an estimated 4,000

residences. According to Chinese press reports, the government stated the demolition was to prevent fires and promote crowd control. Rights groups said that if safety were the primary motivator for this government action, then other provisions, such as building additional housing that met fire safety codes, could be a way to resolve the issue instead of large scale demolitions and expulsions. Local sources stated the destruction was to clear the way for tourist infrastructure and to prevent nuns, monks, and laypersons from outside the area, particularly ethnic Han, from studying at the institute. Reportedly in hopes of saving the institute, Larung Gar's monastic leadership continued to advise residents not to protest the demolitions.

According to local sources, during the year authorities destroyed at least 2,000 residences and evicted approximately 2,500 monks and nuns from an estimated population of 10,000 religious practitioners in Yachen Gar, also in Kardze (Ganzi) Prefecture. Local sources reported monks and nuns from Yachen Gar who returned to their hometowns in the TAR were told they were prohibited from joining any other monastery or nunnery there or participating in any public religious practices.

In a 2016 letter to Chinese authorities that was made public in March before the UN Human Rights Council, six UN special rapporteurs, including the special rapporteur for religious freedom and belief wrote: "While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, grave concern is expressed over the serious repression of the Buddhist Tibetans' cultural and religious practices and learning in Larung Gar and Yachen Gar."

Chinese authorities targeted centrally or conveniently located monasteries or temples to make it more difficult for Tibetan Buddhists to worship. For example, local sources reported Chinese authorities recently demolished Bagar (Baiyanshan) Monastery in Linzhi, TAR – the main worship place for Buddhists in Linzhi city and a popular tourist destination – citing transportation safety concerns.

There were reports of the arbitrary arrest and physical abuse of religious prisoners and prolonged detention of religious figures without criminal charges. In February authorities detained Lobsang Tsultrim, a monk from Kirti Monastery, for shouting slogans supportive of Tibetan freedom and the Dalai Lama and holding his photo in public. Local sources reported police severely beat Tsultrim. His condition and whereabouts remained unknown following his detention in Aba (Ngaba) Prefecture.

In March authorities reportedly arrested Lobsang Dhargyal, a young monk from Kirti Monastery, for staging a solo protest against the Chinese government in Aba (Ngaba) Prefecture. Police detained Dhargyal shortly after his protest, and his whereabouts remained unknown.

In May authorities reportedly detained Gonpo (only name given), a monk from the Oephung Monastery in Nyagrong (Xinlong) County, Kardze (Ganzi) Prefecture, Sichuan Province, after local authorities suspected he had disseminated information regarding local protests to outside contacts. The protests reportedly involved Wangchuk Tseten and Pema Gyaltzen, who self-immolated earlier in the year. Gonpo's whereabouts remained unknown.

In May Chinese police in Machu County of Gansu Province detained Khedup, a 50-year-old Tibetan doctor and monk from the Mura Monastery, for the second time. According to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, authorities accused Khedup of posting the Dalai Lama's teachings on social media, writing and reposting blog posts that expressed support for the monks and nuns displaced from Larung Gar, and advocating for religious freedom and cultural rights for Tibetans. Khedup's condition and whereabouts remained unknown.

According to the *Tibet Post*, on July 29 Chinese authorities released Lobsang Kelsang from Deyang Prison. Police originally detained Kelsang, a Kirti Monastery monk, in 2011 following his self-immolation in protest against Chinese repressive rule. Following his release, the *Tibet Post's* source stated Kelsang was under strict surveillance at his home in northeastern Tibet. There was no additional information regarding his condition. On March 28, authorities released another Kirti monk named Lobsang Kunchok from Deyang Prison in Sichuan Province after he had served more than six years in prison for staging a self-immolation protest. His leg was amputated in prison. After his release Kunchok remained under strict surveillance in his Meruma home.

The condition and whereabouts of Lobsang Tsering, a monk from Kirti Monastery whom authorities reportedly detained in 2016 in Aba (Ngaba) County following a solo protest against Beijing's rule in Tibet, remained unknown. During the protest he wore a ceremonial scarf and carried a photo of the Dalai Lama, calling for his long life. Prison officials reportedly beat him in custody.

In addition, the condition and whereabouts of Ven Pagah and Geshe Orgyen, the abbot and a monk from the Chongri Monastery in Kardze (Ganzi) Prefecture, Sichuan Province, remained unknown. Authorities detained them in 2016 after

the monastery helped organize a mass prayer for the recovery of the Dalai Lama, who was then undergoing medical treatment in the United States.

Limited access to information about prisoners made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of Tibetan prisoners of religious conscience, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered. The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China's Political Prisoner Database included records of 1,414 political or religious prisoners known or thought to be in custody as of November 5. A later accounting specific to Tibet included 512 Tibetan political prisoners who had been detained by December 29, and who were presumed to remain detained or imprisoned. Of the 512 political prisoners, 506 were detained on or after March 2008, the start of a wave of political protests that spread across the Tibetan areas of China. Tibetan Buddhist monks, nuns, and teachers made up 212 cases of the 506 persons serving known sentences.

According to reports, authorities continued "patriotic re-education" campaigns at many monasteries and nunneries across the Tibetan Plateau, forcing monks and nuns to participate in "legal education," denounce the Dalai Lama, express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, and study Mandarin as well as materials praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system. Human Rights Watch reported a video circulated on social media that showed what appeared to be 25 young Tibetan nuns with shaven heads, dressed in military jackets and standing at attention, in rows inside a police or government office. Authorities had reportedly expelled the group from the Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute. The women chanted in unison, "The Tibetans and the Chinese are daughters of the same mother, the name of the mother is China." Another video reportedly showed Tibetan nuns singing and dancing to a Communist Party song. Since Buddhist nuns vow to refrain from singing, dancing, and viewing entertainment, the report suggests these performances were coerced as part of political re-education.

According to many observers, primary sources of grievances among Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns included the requirement that all monks under the age of 18, who are legally unable to join monasteries and Buddhist religious institutions, undergo "patriotic education"; strict controls over religious practice; and intrusive surveillance of many monasteries and nunneries, including the permanent installation of CCP and public security officials and overt camera surveillance systems at religious sites and monasteries. Senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements with local officials whereby resident

monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolation as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries.

The CCP continued to forbid its members from participating in religious activities of any kind, despite reports that many Tibetan government officials and CCP members held religious beliefs.

Government officials regularly denigrated the Dalai Lama publicly and accused the “Dalai Clique” and other outside forces of instigating Tibetan protests, stating such acts were attempts to “split” China. In February new TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie called for monks and nuns in the region to “resolutely fight against the ‘Dalai Clique’ and defend the unity of the motherland.” In September Wu instructed various party and government organs to reduce “negative religious influence” and ensure religious figures in the region were aware they needed to draw a clear line between themselves and the “14th Dalai Lama clique.” Authorities in the TAR continued to prohibit registration of children’s names that included parts of the Dalai Lama’s name or names included on a list blessed by the Dalai Lama.

Although authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, they continued to maintain tight control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypersons, confining many religious activities to officially designated places of worship, restricting or canceling religious festivals, and preventing monks from traveling to villages for politically sensitive events and religious ceremonies. The government suppressed religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent. For example, local authorities again ordered many monasteries and laypersons not to celebrate or organize any public gatherings for celebrations of the Dalai Lama’s 82nd birthday in July, the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising, or the March 14, 2008, outbreak of unrest across the Tibetan Plateau. TAR authorities banned monks and nuns from leaving their monasteries and nunneries during such celebrations. According to local sources, Sichuan provincial authorities patrolled major monasteries in Tibetan areas and warned that those holding special events or celebrations would face severe consequences.

During Lunar New Year celebrations in January and February, ICT reported the authorities, among other measures, imposed “intimidating” military force at a prayer ceremony at Kumbum Monastery; hosted a series of meetings in Lhasa telling monks and nuns to comply with party policy; and inspected “armed forces” and cadres at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. They deployed troops to monitor

prayer festivals elsewhere in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. In early November the government banned the annual Dechen Shedrub prayer festival from occurring in Larung Gar, citing overcrowding and unfinished reconstruction. The ban marked the second consecutive year the government did not allow the 21-year-old festival to take place.

Multiple sources reported open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, remained prohibited in almost all areas. Local officials, many of whom considered the images to be symbols of opposition to the CCP, removed pictures of the Dalai Lama from monasteries and private homes during visits by senior officials. The government also banned pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. Punishments in certain counties inside the TAR for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included closing of venues, expulsion from monasteries, and criminal prosecution.

The TAR government maintained tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared them, religious buildings, and religious institutions to be state property.

Sources continued to report security personnel targeted individuals in religious attire, particularly those from Nagchu (Naqu) and Chamdo (Changdu) Prefectures in the TAR and Tibetan areas outside the TAR, for arbitrary questioning on the streets of Lhasa and other cities and towns. Many Tibetan monks and nuns reportedly chose to wear nonreligious garb to avoid such harassment when traveling outside of their monasteries and around the country.

In many areas, monks and nuns under the age of 18 were forced to leave their monasteries. In July in Draggo (Luhuo) County in Kardze (Ganzi) Prefecture, sources reported the government had removed minors from local monasteries following a January 2015 provincial mandate to remove all monks and nuns under the age of 18 from monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.”

According to a December 18 report from the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, authorities told parents of an eight-year-old girl in Manchu County, Gansu Province, she would not be allowed to attend school because her father, who was reportedly tortured and denied medical assistance in prison, had participated in protests for Tibetan freedom.

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline as many top Buddhist teachers remained in exile or died in India or elsewhere, and some of those who returned from India were not allowed to teach or lead their institutions. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche (who died in 2015), as well as Bon leader Gyalwa Menri Trizin (who died in September) – all resided in exile.

Multiple sources also reported that during the past three years the Chinese government increasingly restricted Tibetan Buddhist monks from visiting Chinese cities to teach. For example, prominent Larung Gar Buddhist Institute religious leaders Khenpo Tsultrim Lode and Khenpo So Dargey, who both previously taught in Chinese cities, were no longer allowed to do so. Authorities also restricted Tibetans' travel inside China, particularly for Tibetans residing outside the TAR who wished to visit the TAR, during sensitive periods. During the year, many religious figures reported it was very difficult for them to enter the TAR to teach or study. The government also restricted the number of monks who could accompany those who received permission to travel to the TAR. Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns stated these restrictions have negatively impacted the quality of monastic education. Many monks expelled from their TAR monasteries after the 2008 Lhasa riots and from Kirti Monastery after a series of self-immolations from 2009 to 2015 had not returned, some because of government prohibitions.

Many Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, continued to encounter difficulties traveling to India for religious purposes. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve their passport applications. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes to local officials, or after promising not to travel to India or to criticize Chinese policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. Numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces waited for up to five years before receiving a passport, often without any explanation for the delay, according to local sources. There were also instances of authorities confiscating and canceling previously issued passports as a way of preventing Tibetans from participating in religious events involving the Dalai Lama in India. Restrictions also remained in place for monks and nuns living in exile, particularly those in India, that made it difficult or impossible for them to travel into Tibetan areas.

Authorities reportedly often hindered Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from delivering religious, educational, and medical services.



According to government policy, newly constructed government-subsidized housing units in many Tibetan areas were located near township and county government seats or along major roads. These new housing units had no nearby monasteries where resettled villagers could worship, and the construction of new temples was prohibited. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans continued to view such measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

Authorities continued to justify interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities, as reported in state media. General administrative affairs in TAR monasteries, which traditionally were managed by monks, were instead overseen by Monastery Management Committees and Monastic Government Working Groups, both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, together with a few government-approved monks. Since 2011 China has established such groups in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas, such as Sichuan Province’s Kirti Monastic Management Committee.

In August Deputy Chief of the Public Security Bureau of Kardze (Ganzi), Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province, Zha Ba was appointed to serve concurrently as party secretary general and president of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy, the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the world. In addition to Zha Ba, six other party cadres were appointed to various positions in the monastery, including deputy party secretaries, vice presidents, and deputy managing directors.

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, the leadership of and membership in the various committees and working groups remained restricted to “politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials.” The TAR CCP committee and government required all monasteries to display prominently the PRC flag and the portraits of five CCP chairmen from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping.

Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to station CCP cadres in, and established police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of, many monasteries. For example, the TAR had more than 8,000 government employees working in 1,787 monasteries, according to local sources and Chinese government reporting in September. Security forces continued to

block access to and from important monasteries during politically sensitive events and political religious anniversaries.

Authorities hindered Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from carrying out environmental protection activities, an important part of traditional Tibetan Buddhist practices, out of fear such activities could create a sense of pride among Tibetans, particularly children, and an awareness of their distinctness from Chinese culture, according to local sources.

In some cases, authorities enforced special restrictions on Tibetans staying at hotels inside and outside the TAR. Police regulations forbade some hotels and guesthouses in the TAR from accepting Tibetan guests, particularly monks and nuns, and required other hotels to notify police departments when Tibetan guests checked in, according to an RFA report confirmed by several hotels.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Because expressions of identity and religion are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religion. Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported incidents in which they were denied hotel rooms, avoided by taxis, and discriminated against in employment opportunities or business transactions.

In July some Tibetan scholars and monks reportedly tried to organize an informal event to discuss current trends of Tibetan language education in a hotel in Chengdu, but the hotel refused to rent the conference room and told the organizers that “religious and ethnic minority gatherings” required advance approval from relevant government departments. As a result, the event was held in a tea shop.

Many Han Buddhists were interested in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries. Tibetan Buddhist monks frequently visited Chinese cities to provide religious instruction to Han Buddhists. In addition, a growing number of Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. government officials, including the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the U.S. Consul General and other

officers in Chengdu, and officers at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing continued sustained and concerted efforts to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

The Office of the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues continued to coordinate U.S. government programs to preserve Tibet's distinct religious, linguistic, and cultural identity as well as efforts to promote dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama. U.S. officials repeatedly raised Tibetan religious freedom issues with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels, such as the Chinese government's refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama and the ongoing demolition campaign at the Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute. In addition to raising systemic issues, such as passport issuance to Tibetans, U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination.

In April officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu met with Chairman of the TAR People's Congress Lobsang Gyaltsen and TAR Governor Qi Zhala. U.S. officials emphasized the importance of upholding cultural and religious rights in Tibet, and expressed concern about the TAR government's failure to protect the rights of local Tibetans to worship freely and assemble in public places.

U.S. officials regularly expressed concerns to the Chinese government at the highest levels regarding severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans' ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights.

In July the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor met with the Gyalwang Karmapa, who along with the Dalai Lama leads two of the four major religious schools in Tibetan Buddhism, to highlight continued U.S. support for religious freedom. Also in July, U.S. officials met with Arjia Thubten Lobsang Rinpoche, one of the highest-ranking reincarnate lamas to flee into exile, following his opposition to becoming the tutor of the Chinese government-appointed Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu. In November the Consul General in Chengdu met with various TAR government officials, including TAR Executive Vice Chairman and TAR Standing Committee Member Norbu Dhundrup (Luobu Dunzhu), TAR National People's Congress Standing Committee Vice Chairman Ju Jianhua, and Nyingchi (Linzhi) Party Secretary Ma Shengchang.

The Consul General called for the TAR government to respect the Tibetan people's right to practice their religion freely.

U.S. officials maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners as well as NGOs in Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom, although travel and other restrictions made it difficult to visit and communicate with these individuals. Although diplomatic access to the TAR remained tightly controlled, U.S. officials did receive access during the year, with authorities granting one U.S. consular visit in July, and two Consul General visits in April and November.

## HONG KONG 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), as well as other laws and policies, states residents have freedom of conscience; freedom of religious belief; and freedom to preach, conduct, and participate in religious activities in public. The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Religious groups are exempt from the legal requirement that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) register, but they may apply for subsidies and concessional terms to run schools and lease land if they register. Falun Gong practitioners reported generally being able to operate openly, but they reported harassment from groups they said were connected to the Communist Party of China.

Religious leaders reported hosting and participating in interfaith activities, such as a local mosque hosting a visitor exchange with a local Jewish synagogue.

The U.S. consulate general affirmed U.S. government support for protecting freedom of religion and belief in meetings with the government, including the Home Affairs Bureau. The Consul General and consulate general officials met regularly with religious leaders and community representatives to promote religious equality.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.2 million (July 2017 estimate). According to SAR government statistics, there are approximately two million Buddhists and Taoists; 480,000 Protestants; 379,000 Roman Catholics; 100,000 Hindus; 20,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); 12,000 Sikhs, and 5,000-6,000 Jews. Local Muslim groups estimate the SAR has approximately 300,000 Muslims. Small communities of Bahais and Zoroastrians also reside in the SAR. Confucianism is widespread, and in some cases, elements of Confucianism are practiced in conjunction with other belief systems. The Falun Gong estimates there are approximately 500 Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong.

There are approximately 50 Protestant denominations, including Anglican, Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of Christ in China, Lutheran,

Methodist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong recognizes the pope and maintains links to the Vatican.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

Under the Basic Law, the Hong Kong SAR has autonomy in the management of religious affairs. The Basic Law calls for ties between the region's religious groups and their mainland counterparts based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect." The Basic Law states residents have freedom of conscience; freedom of religious belief; and freedom to preach, conduct, and participate in religious activities in public. The Basic Law also states the government cannot interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or restrict religious activities that do not contravene other laws.

The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the ICCPR, which include the right to manifest religious belief individually or in community with others, in public or private, and through worship, observance, practice, and teaching. The Bill of Rights Ordinance states persons belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion, and use their own language. The ordinance also protects the right of parents or legal guardians to "ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." These rights may be limited when an emergency is proclaimed and "manifestation" of religious beliefs may be limited by law when necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights of others. Such limitations may not discriminate solely on the basis of religion.

Religious groups are not legally required to register with the government; however, they must register to receive government benefits, such as tax-exempt status, rent subsidies, government or other professional development training, the use of government facilities, or a grant to provide social services. To qualify for such benefits, the group must prove to the satisfaction of the government that it is established solely for religious, charitable, social, or recreational reasons. The government determines whether a religious group's application for tax-exempt status is accepted. Registrants must provide the name and purpose of the organization, identify its office holders, and confirm the address of the principal place of business and any other premises owned or occupied by the organization. If a religious group registers with the government, it enters the registry of all

NGOs, but the government makes no adjudication on the validity of any registered groups. Religious groups may register as a society and/or tax-exempt organization as long as they have at least three members who hold valid SAR identity documents; the registration process normally takes approximately 12 working days. Falun Gong is not classified as a religious group under the law, as it is registered as a society, under which its Hong Kong-based branches are able to establish offices, collect dues from members, and have legal status.

The Basic Law allows private schools to provide religious education. The government offers subsidies to schools built and run by religious groups, should they seek such support. Government subsidized schools must adhere to government curriculum standards and may not bar students based on religion, but they may provide nonmandatory religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Teachers may not discriminate against students because of their religious beliefs. The public school curriculum mandates coursework on ethics and religious studies, with a focus on religious tolerance; the government curriculum also includes elective modules on different world religions.

Religious groups may apply to the government to lease land at concessional terms through Home Affairs Bureau sponsorship. Religious groups may apply to develop or use facilities in accordance with local legislation.

The only direct government role in managing religious affairs is the Chinese Temples Committee, led by the secretary for home affairs. The SAR chief executive appoints its members. The committee oversees the management and logistical operations of 24 of the region's 600 temples and provides grants to other charitable organizations. The committee provides grants to the Home Affairs Bureau for disbursement, in the form of financial assistance to needy ethnic Chinese citizens. The colonial-era law does not require new temples to register to be eligible for Temples Committee assistance.

An approximately 1,200-member Election Committee elects Hong Kong's chief executive. The Basic Law stipulates that the Election Committee's members shall be "broadly representative." Committee members come from four sectors, divided into 38 subsectors, representing various trades, professions, and social services groups. The religious subsector is comprised of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Hong Kong Taoist Association, the Confucian Academy, and the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. These six bodies are each entitled to 10 of the 60 seats for the religious subsector on the Election Committee. The

religious subsector is not required to hold elections under the Chief Executive Election Ordinance. Instead, each religious organization selects its electors in its own fashion. Each of the six designated religious groups is also a member of the Hong Kong Colloquium of Religious Leaders.

### **Government Practices**

During the year, Falun Gong practitioners reported generally being able to operate openly and engage in behavior that remained prohibited elsewhere in the People's Republic of China (PRC), such as distributing literature and conducting public exhibitions. The group had an ongoing lawsuit against the Hong Kong government in 2012 to contest a requirement to obtain government approval for the display of posters; the retrial was scheduled for March 2018. In April Falun Gong practitioners conducted public protests against the treatment of fellow practitioners in Mainland China. In June Falun Gong practitioners displayed banners and posters calling on visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping to stop the persecution of Falun Gong and to bring Jiang Zemin, former head of the Chinese Communist Party, to justice. The Hong Kong Falun Gong Association said that it suspected that the Communist Party of China funded private groups that harassed its members at public events by surrounding them and yelling at them. The association also reported continuing difficulties renting venues for meetings and cultural events from both government and private facilities. The association suspected the cause of this difficulty was the central government's pressure on venue owners.

According to the Falun Gong-affiliated *Epoch Times*, immigration authorities barred 43 Falun Gong practitioners from Taiwan from entering at the Hong Kong International Airport in July. The immigration authorities ordered the practitioners to return to Taiwan without explanation. The practitioners had intended to join an annual parade in Hong Kong peacefully protesting the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in Mainland China.

Some religious groups expressed concern that new PRC religious affairs regulations entering into force in February 2018 could have a negative impact on exchanges and interactions with counterparts in the Mainland.

A variety of government and media sources reported that faith leaders continued to be able to meet with detainees and prisoners of all nationalities. The Home Affairs Bureau functioned as a liaison between religious groups and the government.



Senior government leaders often participated in large-scale events held by religious organizations. The SAR government and legislative council representatives participated in Confucian and Buddhist commemorative activities, Taoist festivals, and other religious events throughout the year.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Religious groups, some of which received government funding, provided a wide range of social services open to those of all religious affiliations including welfare, elder care, hospitals, publishing services, media and employment services, rehabilitation centers, youth and community service functions, and other charitable activities.

Religious leaders reported hosting and participating in interfaith activities. For example, a local mosque hosted a visitor exchange with a local Jewish synagogue, and Jewish leaders hosted Holocaust awareness public events.

Clergy from Hong Kong accepted invitations from state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations on the Mainland to teach at religious institutions. There were also student exchanges between state-sanctioned religious groups on the Mainland and Hong Kong-based religious groups.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

Consulate general officials, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious freedom and interfaith dialogue in meetings with Hong Kong government officials, including representatives of the Home Affairs Bureau.

Consulate general representatives also met with religious leaders, NGOs, and community representatives. The Consul General and other consulate officials met with Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Sikh religious leaders to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and to receive reports about the status of religious freedom both in Hong Kong and in the Mainland.

Throughout the year, consulate general officials showed respect for religious traditions by marking traditional religious holidays and visiting local Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist temples. The Consul General hosted an annual iftar at his residence, and consulate officers participated in other festival celebrations with the Buddhist and Muslim communities. Consulate general officials also participated in

Holocaust commemorations. At all these events, consulate general officials stressed in public and private remarks the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and diversity.

## MACAU 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) grants residents freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach and participate in religious activities in public, and freedom to pursue religious education. The law also protects the right of religious assembly and the rights of religious organizations to administer schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and to provide other social services. The law states the government does not recognize a state religion and explicitly states all religious denominations are equal before the law. The law stipulates religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. Falun Gong continued to hold rallies, including protesting the visit of a high-ranking Communist Party official from the Mainland, but reported difficulty renting venues for events.

Many religious groups, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Bahais, continued to provide diverse social services to anyone, regardless of religious affiliation.

The staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau stressed the importance of religious freedom and tolerance for all religious groups, and they discussed religious communities' relations with their coreligionists on the Mainland and in Hong Kong, in meetings with Macau SAR government officials and civil society representatives.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 602,000 (July 2017 estimate). The SAR Government Information Bureau reports nearly 80 percent of the population practices Buddhism. There are approximately 30,000 Roman Catholics, of whom more than half are foreign domestic workers and other expatriates, and more than 8,000 Protestants. Protestant denominations include the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian Churches. Evangelical Christian and independent local nondenominational churches, some of which are affiliated with Mainland churches, are also present. Muslim groups estimate there are approximately 12,000 Muslims. Smaller religious groups include Bahais, who estimate their membership at above 2,000, and Falun Gong practitioners, who estimate their membership at 50 persons.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal Framework

The Macau Basic Law states residents have freedom of religious belief and the freedom to publicly preach as well as conduct and participate in religious activities. These rights may be limited in extreme situations for national security reasons. The Basic Law further stipulates that the government shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups or in their relations with their counterparts outside Macau. It bars the government from restricting religious activities that do not contravene the laws of the Macau SAR.

Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is charged with safeguarding religious freedom in the SAR.

The law states the Macau SAR government does not recognize a state religion and stipulates all religious denominations are equal before the law. The law further provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education.

Religious groups are not required to register in order to conduct religious activities, but registration enables them to benefit from legal status. Religious groups register with the Identification Bureau, providing their names, identification card numbers, and contact information, as well as the group's name and a copy of the group's charter to register. To receive tax-exempt status or other advantages, religious groups register as charities with the Identification Bureau by submitting the same information and documents as are required to register.

The law guarantees religious organizations may run seminaries and schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and provide other social services.

Schools run by religious organizations may provide religious education under the law. No religious education is required in public schools.

By law, religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church in Macau, in communion with the Holy See, recognizes the pope as its head. The Vatican appoints the bishop for the diocese.

## **Government Practices**

Falun Gong members continued to hold rallies and set up informational sites at public venues without incident. For example, a Falun Gong-related civil society organization reported that in May, Falun Gong members participated in a public rally during a visit from Zhang Dejiang; one of the Chinese Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee members, for what they said was his role in persecuting Falun Gong members on the Mainland. Falun Gong practitioners, however, reported difficulty renting venues for large events, a situation they suspected was a result of Communist Party pressure.

Some religious groups reported the Central Government Liaison Office supported their activities and exchanges with coreligionists on the Mainland. Others said the government acknowledged and did not obstruct charity work conducted on the Mainland. Religious groups said they retained their ability to conduct activities on the Mainland by working through official channels and officially recognized churches.

The Catholic Diocese of Macau continued to run most educational institutions, only 10 of 77 schools were public, according to government statistics from the 2016-17 school year.

The government provided financial support, regardless of religious affiliation, for the establishment of schools, child-care centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers run by religious groups. The government also continued to refer victims of human trafficking to religious organizations for the provision of support services.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Many religious groups, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Bahais, provided social services to individuals of all faiths.

There were reports Mainland students were no longer able to attend local seminaries.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. consulate general officials, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious diversity and discussed religious communities' relations

with their coreligionists on the Mainland in meetings with Macau SAR officials and civil society interlocutors, including the Catholic Bishop of Macau, a Catholic nongovernmental organization, Muslim organizations, and Protestant clergy.