

# **CHINA (INCLUDES TIBET, XINJIANG, HONG KONG, AND MACAU) 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report. Given the scope and severity of reported religious freedom violations specific to Xinjiang this year, a separate section on the region is also included in 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 of deaths in custody and that 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.

Multiple media and NGOs estimated that since April 2017, the government detained at least 800,000 and up to possibly more than 2 million Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other Muslim groups, mostly Chinese citizens, in specially built or converted detention facilities in Xinjiang and subjected them to forced disappearance, torture, physical abuse, and prolonged detention without trial because of their religion and ethnicity. There were reports of deaths among detainees. Authorities maintained extensive and invasive security and surveillance, particularly in Xinjiang, in part to gain information regarding individuals’ religious adherence and practices. 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. Authorities in Xinjiang punished schoolchildren, university students, and their family members for praying. They barred youths from participating in religious activities, including fasting during Ramadan. The government sought the forcible repatriation of Uighur Muslims from foreign countries and detained some of those who returned.

Religious groups reported deaths in or shortly after detentions, disappearances, and arrests and stated authorities tortured Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and members of Falun Gong. The Church of Almighty God reported authorities subjected hundreds of their members to “torture or forced indoctrination.” Although authorities continued to block information about the number of self-immolations of Tibetan Buddhists, including Buddhist monks, there were reportedly four self-immolations during the year. The government began enforcing revised regulations in February that govern the activities of religious groups and their members. Religious leaders and groups stated these regulations increased 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 church leaders 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 Christians and enforce more limitations on their activities, including requiring Christian churches to install surveillance cameras to enable daily police monitoring, and compelling members of house churches and other Christians to sign documents renouncing their Christian faith and church membership. An ongoing campaign of church closings continued during the year, and authorities removed crosses and other Christian symbols from churches, with Henan Province a particular focus area of such activity. In September the Holy See reached a provisional agreement with the government that reportedly would resolve a decades-long dispute concerning the authority to appoint bishops.

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 Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. On July 26, the Vice President said, “Religious persecution is growing in both scope and scale in the world’s most populous country, the People’s Republic of China... Together with other religious minorities, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians are often under attack.” On September 21, the Secretary said, “Hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions of Uighurs are held against their will in so-called re-education camps, where they’re forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated. And we’re concerned too about the intense new government crackdown on Christians in China, which includes heinous actions like closing

churches, burning Bibles, and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith.” A statement from the July 24-26 U.S. Government-hosted Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom said, “Many members of religious minority groups in China – including Uighurs, Hui, and Kazakh Muslims; Tibetan Buddhists; Catholics; Protestants; and Falun Gong – face severe repression and discrimination because of their beliefs. These communities consistently report incidents, in which the authorities allegedly torture, physically abuse, arbitrarily arrest, detain, sentence to prison, or harass adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and peaceful practices. Authorities also restrict travel and interfere with the selection, education, and veneration of religious leaders for many religious groups....” The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general officials met with Chinese officials, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, family members of religious prisoners, NGOs, and others to reinforce U.S. support for 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 November 28, 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 2018 estimate). According to the State Council Information Office’s (SCIO) report on religious policies and practices, published in April, there are more than 200 million religious believers in the country. Many experts, however, believe official estimates understate the total number of religious adherents. The U.S. government estimated in 2010 that Buddhists comprise 18.2 percent of the population, Christians 5.1 percent, Muslims 1.8 percent, and followers of folk religion 21.9 percent. According to a February 2017 estimate by the international 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 2017 data from the Jewish Virtual Library, the country's Jewish population is 2,700.

SCIO's report found the number of Protestants to be 38 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 2017. According to a 2014 State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) statistic, more than 5.7 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), the state-sanctioned organization for all officially recognized Catholic churches. The SCIO's report states there are six million Catholics, although nongovernment estimates suggest there are 10-12 million Catholics, approximately half of whom practice in non-CCPA affiliated churches. Accurate estimates on the numbers of Catholics and Protestants as well as other faiths are difficult to calculate because many adherents practice exclusively at home or in churches that are not state sanctioned.

According to SCIO's report, there are 10 ethnic minorities in which the majority practices Islam, and these 10 groups total more than 20 million persons. 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.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by branch, the vast majority of Buddhists 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 Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, is growing in popularity among the Han Chinese population.

Local and regional figures for the number of religious followers, even state-sanctioned legal religions, are unclear and purposely kept opaque by authorities.

Local governments do not release these statistics, and even official religious organizations do not have accurate numbers. The Pew Research Center and other observers say many religious groups often are underreported.

## **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. 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 based on 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 on religious belief and practice also apply to retired CCP cadres and party members.

The law bans certain religious or spiritual groups. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations” and provides for criminal prosecution of individuals belonging to such groups and punishment 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.”

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 (UFWD). 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 have a state-sanctioned “patriotic religious association” for 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.

In March as part of a restructuring of the central government, the Central Committee of the CCP announced the merger of SARA, which was previously under the purview of the State Council, into the CCP’s UFWD, placing responsibility for religious regulations directly under the party. SARA, while subsumed into the UFWD, continued to conduct work under the same name. This administrative change at the national level was followed in the spring and autumn with parallel changes at the provincial and local levels.

All religious organizations are required to register with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations, all of which SARA oversees through its provincial and local offices. The revised Regulations on Religious Affairs announced in 2017 and implemented on February 1, 2018, state that 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, which must be one of the five “patriotic religious associations.” According to SARA, as of April 2016, there are more than

360,000 clergy, 140,000 places of worship, and 5,500 registered religious groups in the country.

The State Council's revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs strengthen already existing requirements for unregistered religious groups and require unregistered groups be affiliated with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations to legally conduct religious activities. Individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations stipulate any form of illegal activities or illegal properties should be confiscated and a fine between one to three times the value of the illegal incomes/properties should be imposed. The revised regulation adds that, if the illegal incomes/properties cannot be identified, a fine below 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,300) should be imposed. The regulations provide grounds for authorities to penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating illegal incomes and properties and levying fines between 20,000-200,000 RMB (\$2,900-\$29,100). The revisions instate new requirements for members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit "accepting domination by external forces."

The revised Regulations on Religious Affairs include new registration requirements for religious schools that allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their lower-level affiliates to form religious schools. The regulations specify all religious structures, including clergy housing, may not be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as investments. The revisions place new restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments by stipulating the property and income of religious groups, schools, and venues may not be distributed and should be used for activities and charity befitting their purposes; any individual or organization that donates funds to build religious venues is prohibited from owning and using the venues. The revisions also impose a limit on foreign donations to religious groups, stating that any such donations must be used for activities that authorities deem appropriate for the group and the site. The regulations ban donations from foreign groups and individuals if the donations come with any attached conditions and state any donations exceeding 100,000 RMB (\$14,500) must be submitted to the local government for review and approval. Religious groups, religious schools, and religious activity sites must not accept donations from foreign sources with conditions attached. If authorities find a group has illegally accepted a donation, the regulations grant authorities the ability to confiscate the donation and fine the recipient group between one to three times the value of the unlawful donations or, if the amount cannot be determined, a fine of 50,000 RMB (\$7,300).

Additionally, the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” The revisions expand the prescribed steps to address support for “religious extremism,” leaving “extremism” undefined. These steps include recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The revised regulations include a new article placing limits on the online activities of religious groups for the first time, requiring activities be approved by the provincial religious affairs bureau. The revisions also restrict the publication of religious material to guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration.

Regulations concerning religion also vary by province; many provinces updated their regulations during the year following the enforcement of the revised regulations in February. In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments, at their discretion, permit certain unregistered religious communities to carry out religious practices. Examples include local governments in Xinjiang and in Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong Provinces that allow members of Orthodox Christian communities to participate in unregistered religious activities. The central government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as “cultural heritage” rather than religious practice.

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. According to the new regulations implemented February 1, proselytizing in public or holding religious activities in unregistered places of worship is not permitted. In practice, offenders are subject to administrative and criminal penalties.

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 UFWD, 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 2016 criminalizes the act of forcing others to wear “extremist” garments. Neither



the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols the law considers “extremist.”

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

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 to register during these 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, every time they want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel or an apartment, they must 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. 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.

The revised religious regulations implemented in February and policies enacted by the state-sanctioned religious associations inhibit children under the age of 18 from participating in religious activities and religious education. For example, one provision states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools other than religious schools. At the county level, religious affairs bureaus in localities including Henan, Shandong, Anhui, and Xinjiang have released letters telling parents not to take their children under 18 to religious activities or education.

The law mandates the teaching of atheism in schools, 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 remain in force, stating all married couples may have no more than two children, with no exceptions for ethnic or religious minorities. Women choosing to have more than two children are subject to fines ranging from one to ten times the local per capita income.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With respect to Macau, the central 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 central government notified the secretary general, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

### **Government Practices**

There were reports that authorities subjected individuals to death, forced disappearances, and organ harvesting in prison because of their religious beliefs or affiliation.

According to the Church of Almighty God website, [kingdomsalvation.org](http://kingdomsalvation.org), a member of the Church died while in custody shortly after Guizhou authorities arrested her on an unspecified charge in March. Authorities said the unnamed person committed suicide by hanging herself, but did not allow her family to view her body. Officials reportedly told her family the government did not approve of her Christian beliefs. When her relatives questioned the government's determination of her death as suicide, authorities threatened them with potential loss of employment and university access for their children.

According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong publication, on January 16 police took into custody and interrogated Ye Guohua and five other Falun Gong practitioners who were doing Falun Gong exercises. Police released the five practitioners the next

morning and took Ye to the Jianye Detention Center where his family believes he was brutally tortured for his Falun Gong practice. On September 8, Ye suffered what authorities said was a sudden acute illness and was sent to the hospital. Authorities allowed his family to see him briefly, and family members reported Ye was in a coma and his body was swollen. He died three days later. A local Falun Gong practitioner called the detention center to inquire about what happened to Ye and the person who answered the phone said, “He’s dead, so there's nothing that can be done. Asking about this is just asking for trouble.”

The Church of Almighty God reported that in April CCP police secretly arrested and tortured one of its members for 25 days. The individual was sent to the hospital with severe injuries to the skull and she died several months later. The Church of Almighty God also reported that on June 27, two church members were arrested, and on July 2, one of them was “persecuted to death” in Chaoyang Municipal Detention Center.

*Minghui* reported that on July 4, authorities arrested and detained Ma Guilan from Hebei Province for talking to people about Falun Gong. On September 17, authorities said Ma suddenly fell ill and they took her to the hospital where she died hours later. According to the report, several officials came to the hospital and removed Ma’s organs for examination, although it was unclear what happened to those organs.

*The Wall Street Journal* reported that Chinese authorities have subjected prisoners of conscience including Falun Gong, Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and “underground” Christians to forcible organ extraction. Former prisoners stated that while in detention, authorities subjected them to blood tests and unusual medical examinations that were then added to a database, enabling on-demand organ transplants. On December 10, an independent tribunal established by the international NGO International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China issued an interim judgement that the panel was “certain – unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt – that in China, forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practiced for a substantial period of time, involving a very substantial number of victims.”

In August the Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ADHRRF), an international NGO providing regular reports on the situation of the Church of Almighty God, reported that between April and August, authorities in Chongqing, Sichuan Province, detained 109 church members. Of those, 40 remained missing at year’s end.

The whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng remained unknown, although media reported it was believed he remained in the custody of state security police. Police detained Gao, a human rights lawyer who had defended members of Christian groups, Falun Gong practitioners, and other groups, in September 2017.

There were reports that authorities tortured detainees, including by depriving them of food, water, and sleep.

The Church of Almighty God reported authorities subjected 525 of its members to “torture or forced indoctrination” during the year. The Church also reported members suffered miscarriages after police subjected them to “torture and abuse” in detention facilities.

*The Globe and Mail* reported in September that authorities tortured a Canadian citizen who is a Falun Gong practitioner during her 18-month pretrial detention in Beijing. While detained, authorities reportedly initially deprived the individual of food and water, and later pushed her to the ground and pepper sprayed her. Officials arrested her in February 2017 on charges of “organizing or using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.” After the arrest, her husband, whom she stated she believed turned her in to authorities, reportedly transferred all of her property and company shares to his name.

According to *The Epoch Times*, in September a court sentenced Chen Huixia, a Falun Gong practitioner in Hebei Province, to 3.5 years in prison for “using an evil cult to undermine law enforcement,” according to Chen’s daughter. Amnesty International said detention center officials tortured Chen and strapped her to an iron chair so that she was immobile. Chen had been held with limited access to family and lawyers since 2016.

According to *Minghui*, prison authorities 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.

In June Pastor Yang Hua (also known as Li Guozhi) of the Livingstone Church – the largest unregistered church in Guizhou Province before the government shut it down in 2015 – completed his 2.5-year prison sentence for “divulging state secrets.” According to Yang Hua, prison officials tortured him before and after his sentence to extract a confession to the alleged crime. As a result of this as well as inadequate medical care in prison, Yang Hua developed vasculitis, leading to near

paralysis of his legs, and became ill with diabetes. His lawyers stated that authorities continued to surveil Yang Hua following his release from prison.

Police arrested and otherwise detained leaders and members of religious groups, often those connected with groups not registered, as part of the state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations.” There were reports police used violence and beatings during arrest and detention. Reportedly, authorities used vague or insubstantial charges, sometimes in connection with religious activity, to convict and sentence leaders and members of religious groups to years in prison. Some previously detained persons were released.

The Political Prisoner Database (PPDB) maintained by human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation contained the following number of imprisoned religious practitioners at year’s end: 310 Protestants, 205 Church of Almighty God members, 136 Muslims, 22 Buddhists, and nine Catholics, compared with 308 Protestants, 277 Church of Almighty God members, 107 Muslims, 30 Buddhists, and nine Catholics at the end of 2017. According to Dui Hua, these numbers are based on Dui Hua’s classification system for inclusion in the PPDB and are not the total number of religious prisoners. The number of Muslim prisoners did not include 505 Uighur and 234 Kazakh prisoners, which Dui Hua classified as “ethnic prisoners.” According to Dui Hua, these figures did not account for Muslims in “vocational skill education training centers.” The PPDB listed 3,486 Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned at year’s end, compared with 3,516 at the end of 2017. Dui Hua defined imprisoned religious practitioners as “people persecuted for holding religious beliefs that are not officially sanctioned.”

Falun Gong reported that during the year authorities arrested or harassed approximately 9,000 citizens for refusing to renounce Falun Gong. According to *Minghui*, authorities arrested 4,848 Falun Gong practitioners and harassed an additional 4,127. Of those arrested, 2,414 remained in detention at year’s end.

According to the *Epoch Times*, Sichuan Province security officials detained 78 Falun Gong practitioners in the province during the first six months of the year.

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.

The Church of Almighty God reported authorities arrested 11,111 of its members during the year, of which 2,392 remained in custody.

On December 31, Radio Free Asia reported more than 100 riot police and People's Armed Police in Yunnan's Weishan County raided three mosques and forcibly evicted Hui Muslims for engaging in what they said were "illegal religious activities." Authorities injured several individuals who resisted the eviction. Video footage showed police charging into a crowd of unarmed civilians and shoving, dragging, and beating them.

On December 24, two police officers beat and kicked a Christian woman who was protesting the demolition of the TSPM church in Luyi County, Zhoukou City, Henan Province.

Radio Free Asia reported that on September 5, uniformed officers in Nanyang, Henan Province, conducted raids on at least four Protestant churches, physically subduing passersby who asked about the raid.

According to the NGO International Christian Concern, on November 21, more than 100 uniformed government officers raided the Beimen Catholic Church in the city of Ji'an in Jiangxi Province and injured four elderly Catholics who were defending the church.

*The New York Times* reported on December 9, authorities in Sichuan Province raided the Early Rain Covenant Church – Chengdu's highest-membership unregistered church – and detained more than 100 leaders, seminary students, and congregants. This was the third time since May that officials raided the church for lacking proper registration. ChinaAid reported authorities arrested 200 church members in May and another 17 in June. One detainee publicly said officials struck him approximately 30 times as they interrogated him. According to church members, police struck another individual in the face even though he had not resisted arrest. In May authorities arrested lead Pastor Wang Yi, an outspoken critic of the government's controls on religion, on allegations of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble." In December Wang and his wife Jiang Rong were both charged with "inciting subversion of state power," which carries a potential sentence of life imprisonment. As of year's end, the whereabouts and conditions of many detainees remained unknown, including Wang and his wife, who were being held in unspecified locations.

In anticipation of his arrest, Pastor Wang Yi wrote a letter titled “My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience,” which the Early Rain Church published following his detention on December 9. He wrote, “I am filled with anger and disgust at the persecution of the church by this Communist regime, at the wickedness of their depriving people of the freedoms of religion and of conscience...I am not interested in changing any political or legal institutions in China ... I’m not even interested in the question of when the Communist regime’s policies persecuting the church will change. Regardless of which regime I live under now or in the future, as long as the secular government continues to persecute the church, violating human consciences that belong to God alone, I will continue my faithful disobedience.”

*Bitter Winter*, an online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China, reported that pastors across the country released a joint declaration in August supporting religious liberty and condemning the CCP’s revised Regulations on Religious Affairs. At year’s end, more than 600 pastors, ministers, and church elders had signed the statement. According to the report, the Bureau of Religious Affairs in every region was strictly monitoring all individuals who signed the letter and prohibiting them from traveling to Chengdu to support the Early Rain Church. A statement released by the Early Rain Church said authorities had questioned and pressured more than half of the signatories. Reportedly, authorities also raided and shut down churches because their pastors had signed the joint declaration.

In March authorities in Yunnan Province convicted and sentenced Protestant pastor Cao “John” Sanqiang, a U.S. lawful permanent resident and Christian leader, to seven years in prison for “organizing others to illegally cross the border.”

In January Radio Free Asia reported defense attorney Xiao Yunyang said the Yun County People’s Court in Yunnan Province sentenced six Christians to up to 13 years in prison for involvement in the Three Grades of Servants, which the government had designated a “cult.” Authorities in Yunnan reportedly told lawyers defending the accused their licenses to practice would be reviewed. Attorney Li Guisheng said the court revoked the status of lawyers defending Christians in a similar case in Fengqing County, Yunnan Province. In April a court in Dali, Yunnan Province, sentenced Tu Yan to two years of imprisonment for participating in Three Grades of Servants activities. As part of a case that involved more than 100 Christians in Yunnan Province, authorities arrested Tu in 2016, and held her in a detention center for more than 20 months before sentencing her. Authorities originally charged Tu with “organizing and using a cult organization to undermine law enforcement.”

In April the government sentenced Su Tianfu, Copastor with Yang Hua of the Livingstone Church, to a yearlong suspended sentence and a further six months of residential surveillance for “illegally possessing state secrets.” Authorities also fined Su and Yang 7,053,710.68 RMB (\$1.03 million) for collecting “illegal” donations from congregation members. The government rejected Su’s appeal in which he said church members voluntarily donated the money to fund church activities.

On November 16, *Crux* reported that Catholic bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou, recognized by the Vatican but not government authorities, had again been taken into custody. The article stated Shao had been “subjected to several days of interrogation as in the Cultural Revolution” but gave no further details. Authorities denied knowledge of his whereabouts. According to the news agency *Union of Catholic Asian (UCA) News*, authorities released Shao on November 23 after detaining him for 14 days. News sources said security officials detained Shao before Holy Week (April 9-15) 2017 and held him five days. Authorities again subsequently detained Shao in May 2017 and released him on January 3, 2018. Authorities have detained Shao several times since September 2016, reportedly to prevent him from assuming control of Wenzhou Diocese following the death of Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifan.

*UCA News* also reported that Catholic priest Lu Danhua, who was taken into custody by officials of the Qingtian Religious Affairs Bureau in Wenzhou, Zhejiang in December 2017, was released November 22. According to the report, a source said authorities detained Lu because they wanted to replace him at the Qingtian church with a priest from the CCPA.

Media reported police detained Vincenzo Guo Xijin, the Vatican-appointed bishop of the Mindong area of Fujian Province, on March 26 after he reportedly declined to jointly lead an Easter ceremony with government-approved Bishop Vincenzo Zhan Silu, who was not recognized by the Holy See. Police released him the next day. In a compromise, authorities allowed Guo to lead the ceremony, provided he kept it “low key” and agreed not to wear his bishop’s insignia.

On June 3, police arrested a Baptist preacher Liang Ziliang and his wife, Li Yinxiu, in Heshan, Guangdong Province, for distributing brochures about Christianity and carrying banners protesting abortion in a local park, according to ChinaAid. Authorities held the couple at a detention center for several days.



In June Xuanwu District Court, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, sentenced Falun Gong practitioner Ma Zehnyu to three years and fined him 30,000 RMB (\$4,400) for mailing letters in defense of Falun Gong to some of China's top leaders. The Nanjing Intermediate People's Court upheld his conviction in August. Ma's lawyers requested to meet with him in November, but authorities denied the request. As of year's end, Ma was serving his sentence in Suzhou Prison, Jiangsu Province. Ma, who had been imprisoned previously, was arrested in September 2017 and authorities reportedly told him, "This time, we will let you die in jail."

On March 15, police arrested a Liaoning Province woman, Zhou Jinxia, after she traveled from Dalian to Beijing to attempt to share her Christian faith with President Xi Jinping, reported the *Gospel Herald*. Zhou held up a sign in front of Zhongnanhai, the former imperial garden, which said, "God loves the people of the world and is calling out to Xi Jinping." Authorities immediately transported her back to Dalian where authorities criminally charged her.

Radio Free Asia reported in July that authorities in Sichuan Province detained two Tibetan businessmen after they found the men in possession of photographs of the Dalai Lama.

The government did not recognize religious groups not affiliated with the "patriotic religious associations" including unregistered Protestant (also known as "house" churches), Catholic, Muslim, and other groups, and continued to close down or hinder their activities. At times, the closures reportedly were because the group or its activities were unregistered and other times because the place of worship reportedly lacked necessary permits.

Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations. Some officials reportedly still denied the existence of unregistered churches. Although SARA said 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.

In implementing the new regulations on religious affairs, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving their congregations with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader, rather than allow it to alter its legal status as an intact religious community.

ChinaAid reported that after the religious affairs regulations went into effect on February 1, officials in 19 towns in Henan Province went door-to-door, urging Christians to attend the government-sponsored TSPM-affiliated Church instead of unregistered churches. Reportedly, many Christians subsequently met secretly in their homes, afraid of public security agents.

Sources said that local Public Security Bureaus in Liaoning Province began intensifying efforts to force the closure of dozens of unregistered “underground” churches and detained their pastors even before the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs went into effect February 1. According to *Bitter Winter*, since March, authorities shut down at least 40 unregistered churches across Liaoning Province in cities such as Donggang, Anshan, Dandong, and Shenyang.

According to a September Voice of America report, there were widespread reports indicating the government of Henan was waging a campaign against the province’s Christians by taking down crosses, demolishing churches, and erasing Christian slogans from church buildings. According to *Bitter Winter*, in the past years there was the most severe “persecution against Christianity” in Henan Province.

In late July religious affairs officials raided Chongqing Aiyuan House Church and issued an order for the church to end all “illegal” religious activities. Citing the new regulations, the officials told congregants they were conducting religious activities at an unregistered location and ordered them to attend religious services at a TSPM church instead. Authorities warned congregants authorities would arrest them if they did not comply.

On February 4, police shut down another house church in Qingxi Town, Dongguan, Guangdong Province, and dismissed more than 80 congregation members, warning them against future assembly.

ChinaAid reported authorities in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, raided Dao’en Church on September 7, saying the Church had not registered with the government. Authorities closed three of the Church’s five branches and pressured landlords to not renew leases for the Church, according to the report. ChinaAid earlier reported authorities had fined the pastor and another minister of Dao’en Church 10,000 RMB (\$1,500) and threatened to confiscate the Church’s offerings.

Radio Free Asia reported that on September 9, authorities in Beijing shut down Zion Church, a large unregistered Protestant church led by Pastor Jin “Ezra” Mingzhi, saying it had broken rules by organizing mass gatherings without

registering with authorities. A church elder surnamed Yi said more than 100 police officers entered the church and detained some church members who tried to stop them shutting it down. The church's landlord canceled the contract even though the terms of the contract had not yet expired.

Radio Free Asia reported in February that authorities in Shenzhen ordered a 3,000-member Protestant church, the Shekou One Country International Church, to close after a fire and safety inspection. Also in February, authorities in Henan Province fined a Protestant house church in Yuzhou, citing violations of building and safety regulations, and stating the building was an illegal structure because the church failed to obtain required permissions when it was built.

According to a source, local authorities in Liaoning Province charged underground church leaders with taking members' money under false pretenses. ChinaAid reported that on August 20, authorities visited a church in Shenyang they said was an "unapproved venue." Officials deemed church offerings illegal and forced the church to close by August 23. On December 31, Radio Free Asia reported authorities sealed three mosques in Yunnan's Weishan County after a protest, to prevent further use as they were pending demolition at year's end. A local source reportedly said local Muslims had submitted the right paperwork to register the mosques but were unsuccessful, and that the local state-sanctioned Islamic Association of China (IAC) approved of the closures.

The *South China Morning Post* reported in August hundreds of Hui Muslims gathered outside the Weizhou Grand Mosque in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region to protest its demolition. The mosque had been recently rebuilt, the second to replace Weizhou's 600-year-old mosque that was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The article said although the government seemed to support the mosque's construction in 2015, government officials said the mosque had not been granted the necessary planning and construction permits. After days of negotiation, authorities and religious leaders agreed on an alternative plan: instead of demolishing the mosque, the government would revamp the mosque and construction would only take place once everyone was happy with the renovation plan. The government initially proposed removing eight of the mosque's nine domes, but the local community opposed the idea.

According to a Radio Free Asia report, local believers in Henan said authorities demolished or shut down over 100 churches and crosses in August.

According to the Association for the Defense of Human and Religious Rights, on September 16, authorities in Zhengzhou, Henan Province demolished Yangzhai Zhen Jesus Church after forcing members to agree to the demolition by threatening their families' livelihood.

ChinaAid reported that on September 9, approximately 100 officials from the religious affairs and public security bureaus attempted to break into Dali Christian Church, in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, but more than 400 church members stopped them. The officials left after handing the church a document that said the building was not a legal religious activities site and the religious department had not approved the day's speaker, both violations of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs. Church members therefore immediately had to cease holding "illegal" religious events.

*Bitter Winter* reported that from October 28 to November 1, authorities shut down or sealed off 35 Buddhist temples and memorial temples in the city of Xinmi, Henan Province.

ChinaAid reported that on Sunday, January 14, more than 20 government agents closed an unregistered church in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, interrupting a service led by Lou Siping. They informed the Christians gathered there that the building had not been registered and took 30 church members to the police station for questioning. Authorities later demanded the church's landlord cancel the church lease.

In January police and local officials dynamited the 50,000-member Golden Lampstand (Jindengtai) Church in Linfen, Shanxi Province, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. The state-run *Global Times* reported the destruction was part of a campaign against "illegal buildings." This church did not register with TSPM and reportedly had been involved in a dispute with local officials, who refused to grant the building permits when it was originally constructed.

*Bitter Winter* reported the United Front Work Department of Shaanxi Province issued a document outlining a campaign against Buddhist and Daoist religious sites in the Qinling Mountains that the department said violated construction or processing regulations. In July authorities destroyed Longhua Temple of Taiyi Town, Chang'an District, Xi'an City, saying it did not have a permit. At the end of August authorities sent 100 armed police officers and two excavators to destroy the Jade Buddha Temple in Huyi District of Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province. Several

monks who lived at the temple were left homeless and, according to *Bitter Winter* sources, local villagers were not allowed to admit monks into their homes.

ChinaAid reported government officials in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province, destroyed the St. Theresa Convent on December 18-19. Nuns living at the convent received an eviction notice on the morning of December 18, and by 11:00 p.m., authorities began demolishing the site. According to the report, church members said they believed authorities destroyed the convent to put pressure on congregations not registered with the government. Following the convent's demolition, the nuns were left temporarily homeless.

A number of Catholic churches and bishops appointed by the pope remained unable to register with the CCPA. The government and the Holy See still did not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican had no representative in the country. In September the Holy See and the China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs both announced that the two sides had reached a provisional agreement that would resolve a decades-long dispute concerning the authority to appoint bishops. Neither provided details of the provisional agreement. When speaking to media in late September, Pope Francis said there would be a "dialogue" on bishops who would be named by the pope. At year's end, there was no official explanation on what the mechanism would be for the Vatican and the government to make decisions regarding appointment of bishops. The existing government regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops requires candidate bishops to publicly pledge to support the CCP. Also in September the Vatican said the pope would be lifting the excommunication of seven bishops who had been ordained without the pope's authority. The Vatican subsequently appointed two of these men to lead dioceses and appointed the bishops it had formerly appointed in those dioceses (including Bishop Gua of Mingdon) as auxiliary bishops.

In an interview in February, retired Archbishop of Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium condemned talks between the Holy See and the Chinese government. Zen expressed concerns that a deal between the Holy See and the government would give too much power to authorities and would place the country's Catholics in a "birdcage."

Unofficially, authorities tolerated members of foreigner groups meeting for private religious celebrations. International churches received heavy scrutiny, as authorities forced them to require passport checks and registration for members to prevent Chinese nationals from attending "foreigner" services.

In May SARA released draft Measures on the Administration of Foreigners' Group Religious Activities in the Mainland Territory of the People's Republic of China. These regulations, which would apply to religious activities of groups containing 50 or more foreigners, would update regulations last issued in 1991. The draft amendments stipulate where groups may hold religious activities, who can preside over and attend these activities, and who would be responsible for reporting activities to authorities and what kind of information about the participants they would be required to provide. To obtain approval for their activities, groups would need to name three representatives who do not possess diplomatic immunity. Foreign groups would need to allow the corresponding state-sanctioned religious association to assign a Chinese religious professional to preside over the function. All other Chinese citizens would be barred from attending the activities of these foreign groups. As of the end of the year, SARA had not announced the implementation of these regulations.

The government continued to recognize as "lawful" only those religious activities it sanctioned and controlled through the "patriotic religious associations" or otherwise. Government-accredited religious personnel had to conduct such activities and only in government-approved places of religious activity.

SARA continued to maintain statistics on registered religious groups. According to the SCIO's report on religious policies and practice released in September 2017, there were 21 officially recognized Protestant seminaries, 57,000 clerical personnel, and 60,000 churches and other meeting places. This report stated there were 91 religious schools in the country approved by SARA, including nine Catholic schools. This report also stated there were six national level religious colleges. Civil society groups reported the government closed CCPA-affiliated seminaries in Shanghai and Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Although there were two CCPA seminaries in Beijing, civil society regarded one of them to be primarily used as the CCPA's propaganda for international visitors.

The state-run *Global Times* quoted Bishop Guo Jincai, Secretary General of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China, as stating there were 61 (CCPA-affiliated) Catholic bishops, 12 of them over the age of 80. The Vatican did not previously recognize eight of these bishops, and had excommunicated three of them. *Crux*, an online newspaper reporting on the Catholic Church, reported in September more than 37 Catholic bishops remained independent of the CCPA. In some locations, local authorities reportedly pressured unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See.

The SCIO report also estimated there were 35,000 mosques, 57,000 imams, and 10 Quran institutes (religious seminaries under the auspices of IAC) in the country.

Religious groups reported “patriotic religious associations” continued to be subject to CCP interference in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice. Official “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.

As part of its efforts to implement the central government’s policy of Sinicization of religions, at a forum in Guizhou in September, TSPM leaders highlighted what they said was TSPM’s important role in helping China’s Christianity get rid of foreign influence during the last 68 years and helping Christian churches to truly gain sovereignty while strengthening Christians’ patriotism. Religious scholars said they interpreted this statement as informal guidance for Christians to curtail all interactions with international Christian groups.

At the end of August in Jiaozuo City, Henan Province, CCP officials forcibly occupied and converted multiple TSPM churches into communist party schools, cultural centers, and activity hubs. *Bitter Winter* reported that in September at least 20 churches in Dengzhou City and more than 138 churches in Luoyang City, including some government-approved TSPM churches, were repurposed to suit government needs.

According to sources, Northeast China had fewer unregistered churches than other parts of the country. While still strictly controlled, the northeastern religious groups had reportedly enjoyed relatively more autonomy over their sermons and practices in past years. Sources indicated that authorities closed some Sunday schools in Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang Provinces. According to sources, until July authorities in Northeast China rarely enforced a rule preventing churches from holding services for minors under the age of 18. Until recently, the updated religion regulations mainly affected unregistered churches. In July authorities began scrutinizing registered churches in Liaoning more strictly, including pressuring young adults over the age of 18 not to attend church services. Some churches reported also shutting down their college student services.

There were reports of government officials, companies, and education authorities compelling members of house churches and other Christians to sign documents renouncing their Christian faith and church membership.

In February many companies began requiring workers to sign a “no-faith commitment,” according to *Bitter Winter*. Between April and August, local security personnel approached nearly 300 members of Zion Church in Beijing and pressured members to sign a document renouncing their church membership as well as their Christian faith.

Radio Free Asia reported that in mid-September, the CCP took further steps to implement the ban on religious activity among government employees, including schoolteachers and medical personnel. According to local Christians, authorities were asking teachers working in high schools in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Henan Provinces to sign a letter pledging to hold no religious beliefs. Christian believers said the crackdown on religious beliefs among teachers came alongside pressure on students, who are required to submit to an interview with school authorities if they declare religious beliefs on mandatory forms.

*World Watch Monitor*, an online news site reporting on Christianity, reported in April that teachers forced more than 300 Christian children in two high schools in Zhejiang Province to fill out a form stating they did not adhere to any religion. According to the report, the children were given a questionnaire about their faith and pressured to write they had no religion. Those who did not comply reportedly were denied access to opportunities at school and faced the potential threat of not receiving certificates of completion, which would make them unable to attend college.

In May ChinaAid reported education authorities in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, asked students to state the religious beliefs of their families. After identifying students whose parents were Catholic or another Christian denomination, authorities visited the parents in their homes to persuade them to give up their religious beliefs. Some authorities used the parents’ employers to pressure parents to renounce their religious beliefs, including by withholding bonuses, according to the report.

According to pastors and a group that monitors religion in China, the government was ordering Christians to sign papers renouncing their faith. The *New York Post* reported in September that ChinaAid leadership released video footage of what appeared to be piles of burning Bibles and forms stating that signatories renounced their Christian faith. ChinaAid leadership said this marked the first time since the Cultural Revolution that Christians had been compelled to make such declarations, under the fear of expulsion from school and the loss of welfare benefits.



International media and NGOs reported on a nation-wide campaign to “Sinicize religion,” and the government restricted individuals’ ability to express or practice their religion in other ways.

On March 28, in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, the government launched a five-year plan on promoting the “Sinicization of Christianity.” The plan outline advocated “incorporating the Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clergy attire, and the architectural style of church buildings” and proposed to “retranslate the Bible or rewrite biblical commentaries.” The government’s proposed plan to augment the content of the Bible in line with CCP policies fueled speculation in Christian groups that it was a reason the government began enforcing a ban on online Bible sales.

According to the *South China Morning Post*, cities throughout Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in north-central China reported efforts by authorities to replace Islamic structures and symbols with traditional Chinese iconography. Individuals in Yinchuan reported bright red lamps with Chinese cloud designs replacing gray lamp posts with Islamic motifs and two round flat rings in the style of Chinese jade discs replacing two large crescent moon sculptures. The local government banned Arab-style mosques and set out plans to convert existing mosques to resemble Chinese temples.

Radio Free Asia reported in August that state-sanctioned religious associations had proposed a measure that would require all places of worship to fly the national flag. Representatives at a conference in Beijing indicated that the national flag should be raised at religious venues during national holidays and during each religion’s important festivals and celebrations. The measure also indicated that otherwise officials would place scrutiny on the places of worship.

Authorities reportedly pressured churches to display banners with political ideology, recite the national anthem before singing Christian hymns, and engage in other acts demonstrating one’s loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party over the church.

ChinaAid reported that in early July, more than 100 churches in Xinyu County, Jiangxi Province, received a warning from local authorities demanding they dismantle their crosses and replace them with an image of President Xi Jinping or the national flag. Reportedly, government agents destroyed the crosses of churches that refused to dismantle their crosses.

In September Pastor Zhang Liang reported authorities in Shangqiu, Henan Province, had begun requiring churches to flank the cross with a photograph of Chairman Mao Zedong on one side and President Xi Jinping on the other.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on November 1, authorities in Luoning County, Henan Province ordered a government-approved TSPM church to remove one of the Ten Commandments from a sign displayed on its wall. Authorities said President Xi Jinping opposed the commandment “You shall have no other gods before me,” and they wiped it off from the display. Prior to this incident, media reported in August government officials had forcibly dismantled the church’s cross.

In 2017, the Ningxia government initiated a campaign to remove Arabic translations from street signs, and by February 2018, Arabic logos for halal restaurants and butcher shops were removed and replaced by Chinese characters and pinyin. In Tongxin, Hui County, Ningxia, the article stated the government barred party members from going to mosques for daily prayers or taking part in the Hajj, even after they retired from office. Authorities also banned government workers from wearing white caps to work. In Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia, authorities banned calls to prayer on the grounds of noise pollution. Government officials ordered the Quran and books on Islam removed from souvenir shops and ordered mosques to cancel public Arabic-language courses.

*Bitter Winter* reported that authorities told Buddhist temple leaders in Xinmi, Henan Province, they had to take down banners and lock their doors because this was CCP Central Party Committee policy. Authorities painted over the names of CCP members who had donated to the temples and whose names were displayed on the donors’ recognition steles. According to the report, villagers said they saw the defacing of the donors’ steles as the coming of another Cultural Revolution.

According to media reports, at least four cities and one province ordered restrictions on Christmas celebrations including bans on Christmas decorations, promotional activities in shops, Christmas-themed events, and public performances. Authorities also increased law enforcement and patrols in the days leading up to December 25 to prevent any illegal Christmas celebrations. Police in Kunming issued a notice prohibiting Christmas decorations and related activities in crowded places such as hotels, karaoke parlors, internet cafes, and bars. The notice said, “It is forbidden to hang Christmas stockings, wear Christmas hats, and place Christmas trees, and so on.” Officials sent a notice to churches in Zhoukou, Henan Province, requiring them to vet Christmas commemorations with the government,

forbidding minors from participating in Christmas events, and limiting expenses to 2000 RMB (\$290). School administrators at a university in Shanghai canceled a student union's Christmas celebration, and administrators warned students in Qingdao against celebrating Christmas.

According to a brief statement released on August 28 by the National People's Congress, the country's new revised civil code would no longer retain the relevant content of family planning, which could scrap birth restrictions altogether. The revised code, however, will not be completed until March 2020, and there is no indication yet how exactly the change would be made, or whether any other restrictions or conditions might remain on Chinese families.

In December state-run media outlet the *Global Times* reported that the Gansu provincial market regulation bureau banned four provincial halal certifications for food, restaurants, dairy, and noodles. The article cited an official at the Gansu Ethnic Affairs Commission who stated that one region and five provinces (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Shaanxi, Henan, Yunnan, and Tianjin Provinces) would also restrict the use of halal certifications on various products. The Ethnic Affairs Commission employee stated the province was restricting these standards in line with the CCP's United Front Work Department requirement to "fight the pan-halal tendency."

Hui Muslims in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and 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.

In August the government of Hubei Province issued new regulations on the commercialization of the Buddhist and Daoist religions stating all activities of any religion must be confined to the private sphere and strictly prohibiting religious iconography in the public sphere.

Authorities increased social media and other surveillance on religious groups. According to *Bitter Winter*, church leaders in Hebei and Henan Provinces had begun warning their church members that their social media accounts were under surveillance and cautioned them not to transmit religious content.

Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone applications to distribute Christian materials reported the government increased censorship of these materials.

In July Radio Free Asia reported authorities in Malho, Qinghai Province, tightened controls on social media and deployed large numbers of armed police to Tibetan villages to discourage celebrations of the July 6 birthday of the Dalai Lama. Authorities warned managers of social media chat groups to restrict sharing any secret or internal information by Tibetans and to keep an eye out for attempts to organize celebrations of the spiritual leader.

*The Wall Street Journal* reported in July that the IAC required Chinese Muslims departing for Mecca in Saudi Arabia to wear customized smart cards with personal data and a GPS tracker.

In September Pastor Zhang Liang reported the Chinese government had tightened its control over his church's operations in Shangqiu, Henan Province. Zhang said the government was installing "information officers" to report on "antigovernment" activities and behavior seen as a threat to social stability.

In April Beijing authorities ordered an unregistered church, Zion Church, to install 24 closed-circuit surveillance cameras inside the church, according to *Reuters*. After church leadership refused this order, police and security personnel harassed and threatened church members and ultimately forced the eviction of the church. In November the State Security Bureau installed surveillance equipment including multiple surveillance cameras inside an officially registered Protestant church in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, including in washrooms, according to *Bitter Winter*.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible and other religious literature, and government prepared regulations to extended control of online postings by religious groups.

The government limited distribution of Bibles to CCPA and TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops inside churches, 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 and CCPA to publish the Bible legally. According to reports, while there were no independent domestic Christian booksellers, publishers without a religious

affiliation 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.

While only government-sanctioned bodies that oversee Christian churches were officially able to sell the Bible, a *South China Morning Post* article reported that authorities had tended to look the other way. The article also reported that on several visits in April Ministry of Culture inspectors told the Christian bookstores they could no longer sell “foreign books.”

Radio Free Asia reported that starting April 2, online selling platforms Taobao, JD.com, and Dangdang banned the sale of Bibles without international standard book numbers (ISBNs) and related spiritual books, according to a Taobao seller. A *New York Times* article said the government banned online retailers from selling the Bible, and on leading online stores, internet searches for the Bible came up empty. The article also reported that Christianity was the only major religion in China whose major holy text “cannot be sold through normal commercial channels.” As of the end of the year, at least one dual-language (English and Chinese) Bible and two foreign-published English language Bibles were sold on some online sites. Bibles in Chinese only were still unavailable for online purchase, however.

*Bitter Winter* reported that in Anshan Prefecture, Liaoning Province, police imposed a 400,000 RMB (\$58,200) fine on any church discovered with an “unofficial” version of the Bible. Faced with these pressures, underground churches reported gathering far less frequently and breaking up into small groups that moved around and held services at different locations.

The government continued to allow some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

In September the Associated Press reported the government posted draft rules regulating religious activity on the internet that would impose tight limits on what could be said or posted, including a ban on criticizing official religious policies and promoting religion among minors. The draft regulations would require anyone

wishing to provide religious instruction or similar services online to apply by name and have authorities deem them morally fit and politically reliable. They also would prohibit livestreaming of religious activities, including praying, preaching, or burning incense.

According to *Bitter Winter*, the draft rules regulating religious activity on the internet would force churches to obtain licenses so the Chinese government could control what religious information is posted online.

The government continued limitations on religious education.

The *South China Morning Post* reported in January education officials from the local government in Guanghe County, a largely Hui Muslim area in Gansu Province, banned children from taking part in religious education during the Lunar New Year break. Officials did not allow children to attend religious events, read scripture in classes, or enter religious venues during the holiday, and instructed teachers and students to “strengthen political ideology and propaganda.” Officials also implemented similar restrictions in Linxia, the capital city of the Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

Starting in April authorities reportedly pressured churches to prevent children under 18 years old from attending services or otherwise studying the Bible. Local government departments of religious affairs in Henan, Shandong, and Anhui Provinces released public letters announcing juveniles could not enter religious venues or attend religious education activities. One announcement in Xinxiang City, Henan Province stated the purpose of these measures was to ensure minors do not believe in religion, enter religious places, participate in religious activities, or participate in religious training classes. The same message was delivered in other locations. AsiaNews reported in April a joint notice from the Henan Catholic Patriotic Association and the Henan Commission for Church Affairs required the religious bodies to adhere to the principle of “separating religion from education,” and in particular prohibit religious associations from organizing activities of any type to disseminate religious education to minors and effectively prohibit minors from attending church.

In August Open Doors USA, a Christian nonprofit organization, reported that in Shangrao, Jiangxi Province, more than 40 churches hung slogans that said “Non-locals are prohibited from preaching; no underage people allowed in church.”

Radio Free Asia reported that on October 25, state security agents prevented more than 100 Protestants from unrecognized churches from traveling to a religious training event in South Korea hosted by a U.S. church. Saying the participants would “likely damage national security,” airport police in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong issued travel bans on the conference participants.

Radio Free Asia reported in July that authorities in Dzachuka, a Tibetan-populated region of Sichuan Province, forced Buddhist monks aged 15 and younger to leave their monasteries and placed them in government-run schools. Authorities strictly limited the number of monks and nuns enrolled at the monasteries and forced those remaining to take part in classes promoting loyalty to the country and the ruling CCP.

On April 16, approximately 20 officials from Fujian Province’s Xiamen Education Bureau and the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau conducted a surprise inspection, without warrants, of a kindergarten operated by a local, unregistered house church. Authorities said the kindergarten operation was illegal. Authorities reportedly tried to confiscate religious teaching materials and shut down the school, but faculty members and parents prevented them from doing so.

On June 20, Liang Liuning, Deputy Director General of the Guangxi Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, held two lectures for more than 100 Islamic clerics and administrators on the essence of the 19th Party Congress and the implementation of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning had to obtain the support of the corresponding official “patriotic religious association.” The government continued to require students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and political issues were included in examinations of graduates from religious schools. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

The government reportedly discriminated in employment against members of religious groups it identified as “cults” and others and prevented employees from participating in religious activities.

In February the Guiyang-based Yunnan District People’s Court specified in its recruitment notice for judicial assistants that individuals who previously

participated in “illegal religious activities” or “cult-organized activities” could not apply for the position.

On February 18, formerly jailed Jiangmen house church clergyman Ruan Haonan said it was almost impossible for a blacklisted “cult” member to find a decent job. Ruan was a chef before he worked full time at a house church in Heshan City. He said authorities warned each employer Ruan contacted, and as a result, no employer dared offer him a job. Heshan police arrested Ruan on June 12, 2017, for sabotaging law enforcement by utilizing and organizing “heretic cult organizations” and released him on bail with restricted movement in July 2017. ChinaAid reported that while on bail, authorities required Ruan to report to the Public Security Bureau every three months and to obtain permission before traveling.

According to sources, individuals with Christian affiliations in Northeast China faced difficulties with career enhancement or government employment. Government officials or employees tied to state-affiliated organizations often attempted to hide their religious beliefs to avoid discrimination. The sources said it was one reason some believers choose to attend unregistered rather than official churches.

Healthcare professionals were required to discover, stop, and report violations of law regarding religion, including among family, friends, and neighbors, according to a letter issued to staff at the Yueqing Maternal and Child Health Hospital in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province. Any staff organizing or participating in religious activities in the hospital could be fired. Staff were banned from wearing any clothing linked to a religious belief. Staff were also considered to have committed a violation if they did not adhere to the pledge not to follow any religion or participate in religious activities. The hospital’s letter stated violations of this policy would lead to “education.” Hospitals in Xinyu, Jiangxi Province, posted banners and notices against religious beliefs as well.

Authorities took other actions against “cults.” On March 17, Guangzhou’s Huadu District Political and Law Commission hosted an anticult organization event in Hongshan Village for local students. After the event, many students vowed to stay away from any “cult” organization and signed their names on the anticult signature wall.

In April Fujian Province’s Zhangpu County Government and Zhangzhou Justice Department redesigned a local public park giving it an anticult theme to promote



the results of the 19th Party Congress and related anticult laws and raise awareness of the influence of “cults.”

On April 24, the Foshan Municipal CCP Political and Legal Commission, the Guangdong University of Finance and Economics’ Shanshui Campus (Foshan), and the Guangdong Legal Studies Institute Shanshui Campus jointly launched an anticult campaign highlighting the influence of “cults” on state security, social developments, and family lives.

On February 24, the Guangdong Provincial Anti-Heretic Cult Association posted a letter drafted by former Guangzhou Falun Gong member Zhang Zhiming denouncing Falun Gong as a “cult organization” that had jeopardized his work and ruined his family life.

In September Jiangxi Province’s commission on religious affairs published an article indicating changes to the basic nature of religious control in the province. The article stated all religious activities should be “amiable and gentle” and that they should contribute to the unity of the people.

On November 29, *The Telegraph* reported that local authorities in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region had signed a “cooperation antiterrorism agreement” with Xinjiang officials to “learn from the latter’s experiences in promoting social stability.” As part of these efforts, the Communist Party head of Ningxia, Zhang Yunsheng, went to Xinjiang to learn about combatting terrorism and managing religious affairs. According to a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, there was a growing fear among Chinese that the Xinjiang model could spread across the country and have grave consequences for religious freedom.

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.”

The government continued its efforts to restrict the movement of the Dalai Lama. After the Dalai Lama visited Sweden in September, *Global Times* reported the government consistently firmly opposed the decision of any country to allow such a visit, adding "...some countries still turn a deaf ear, taking chances to challenge China's bottom line."

In October ChinaAid reported that since the second week of September, a CCP-backed militant group, United Wa State Army, had arrested more than 200 Christian pastors and missionaries in territory the group controls in Shan State, Burma, according to Lahu Baptist Church, a local church in Burma. At least 100 were released after guards forced prisoners to sign a pledge they would pray only at home, rather than at churches. According to the report, many observers believed close ties between United Wa State Army and China fueled these actions.

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

Because the government and individuals closely link religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. The Council on Foreign Relations reported 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, despite the government's announcement in September 2017 that it would censor some anti-Muslim expression on the internet.

In some online forums, anti-Muslim speech regarding the Hui Muslims in Shadian, Yunnan Province persisted. Some individuals said imams in Shadian colluded with Rohingya Muslims from Burma on drug use and drug trafficking in Shadian. Other criticisms in these online forums include labelling the imams in Shadian as radicals for encouraging Hui Muslims in the city to marry Rohingya individuals and not to send their children to school.

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. There were also reports from Falun Gong practitioners that employers dismissed them for practicing Falun Gong. In some instances, landlords

discriminated against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs. Falun Gong practitioners reported having a very difficult time finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Following government crackdowns in May and December, members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, reported local authorities pressured their landlords to evict them due to their affiliation with the unregistered church. The members also said their universities and employers received pressure from the local authorities to expel them from the schools or terminate their employment.

*The Guardian* reported Uighurs faced difficulty in finding accommodation because local hotels frequently told Uighur visitors no rooms were available. One individual, who was initially mistaken as a foreigner, said hotel staff denied him entry to a hotel after they saw the word Uighur on his Chinese identification card. Hotels are required to report on guests to local police authorities, and hoteliers could face punishment for hosting Uighurs.

On April 19, the son of a pastor from the Shenzhen-based Canaan House Church in Guangdong Province said the church's landlord relented to authorities' pressure to terminate the lease and cut off the church's electrical supply. The pastor's son said the church faced "constant persecution" after unidentified people repeatedly harassed the church, broke into the church's property, and requested members leave the building for what authorities said were safety or fire hazards.

On July 5, a Uighur woman in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province reportedly posted a letter online addressed to Shenzhen Party Secretary Wang Weizhong complaining about the frustrating restrictions she experienced as an ethnic minority in finding a rental apartment. The Uighur woman identified herself as a CCP member holding a senior management position in a big company in Shenzhen. After receiving discouraging messages from the local community, several landlords broke her rental contracts. Local officials told the woman they required her landlord and her to report in person each week to the police, which she said no landlord wanted to do. The woman was staying in a colleague's apartment at year's end.

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

The Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. The Vice President, Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and the Ambassador for International Religious Freedom met with survivors of religious

persecution or their family members, from the Uighur Muslim, Tibetan Buddhist, and Protestant communities at the July Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington. At the ministerial, the Vice President said, “religious persecution is growing in both scope and scale in the world’s most populous country, the People’s Republic of China...together with other religious minorities, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians are often under attack.” On September 21, the Secretary of State said, “Hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of Uighurs are held against their will in so-called reeducation camps where they’re forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated. And we’re concerned too about the intense new government crackdown on Christians in China, which includes heinous actions like closing churches, burning Bibles, and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith.”

At the ministerial the United States, Canada, Kosovo, and the United Kingdom issued a statement that said, “As representatives of the international community, we are deeply concerned about the significant restrictions on religious freedom in China and call on the Chinese government to respect the human rights of all individuals. Many members of religious minority groups in China – including Uighurs, Hui, and Kazakh Muslims; Tibetan Buddhists; Catholics; Protestants; and Falun Gong – face severe repression and discrimination because of their beliefs. These communities consistently report incidents, in which the authorities allegedly torture, physically abuse, arbitrarily arrest, detain, sentence to prison, or harass adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and peaceful practices.”

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.

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 release prisoners of conscience. The Ambassador highlighted religious freedom in private diplomacy with senior officials. The Department of State, embassy, and consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including individuals imprisoned for religious reasons.

The Ambassador, Consuls General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan, 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. For example, while in Yunnan Province, the Ambassador visited two long-standing Christian churches in areas heavily populated by religious minorities, meeting with local clergy members. The Consul General similarly met with Muslim and Christian leaders in Yunnan Province. 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 arranged for the introduction of religious officials to members of U.S. religious communities and U.S. government agencies that engaged with those communities.

Throughout the year, the embassy and consulates general reached large local audiences with messages promoting respect, understanding, and tolerance for religious diversity. Through a series of lectures by academics and government officials, the embassy and consulates general discussed with audiences a number of religious freedom topics. In January an embassy-sponsored visitor discussed with a Beijing audience the role religious organizations played in shaping public and private institutions in the United States. Also in January a consulate general officer led a discussion in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, about the U.S. Muslim community, addressing questions about religious conflict, highlighting the connection between freedom of religion and free speech, and sparking a debate about the extent to which a diverse society must exercise tolerance toward minorities. In May an official at the Consulate General in Shenyang provided a historical perspective on major U.S. religions, detailed the constitution's protection of religious expression, and led the audience in a discussion that included comments about rule of law, civil rights, and racial equality. In June the embassy held a discussion about the evolving interaction between the gay community and religious communities in the United States, with a focus on the interaction of religious groups and social change. Later in June an officer of the Consulate General in Shanghai explained recent U.S. legal cases involving freedom of religion, and facilitated audience discussion of the contours of proper legal protections for religious groups. The embassy hosted a presentation in July by a film director about her documentary portraying attempts by Muslims to increase gender equality within their community. The director engaged an audience of hundreds in a discussion about the value of equality and tolerance within and across religious traditions. That same month, an officer at the Consulate General

in Guangzhou presented research on religion in politics, including the historical role of religious congregations in political activism.

The embassy amplified Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to Chinese citizens through postings to the embassy website and to Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. A series of six posts about the July Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom garnered over six million views on these social media accounts, and 46,141 direct engagements by netizens. A set of four posts regarding the 2017 International Religious Freedom Report received 1.4 million views. The embassy social media team shared religious holiday greetings from the President, Secretary of State, and Ambassador. This included well wishes on the occasion of special religious days for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists. Millions of local citizens viewed these holiday messages, and the messages often sparking further comments and questions, such as, “A great country must have a broad mind!,” “Society has reached the point where one is not even allowed to read the Bible,” and “How do you protect the religious freedom of atheists?” Over the course of the year, the embassy and the consulates general regularly addressed questions of religious tolerance raised by some of the millions of online followers, offering them uniquely U.S. perspectives on religious freedom and tolerance.

Authorities continually harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities interrupted a meeting between the abbot of a prominent Tibetan Buddhist monastery and the Chengdu Consul General, quickly removing the abbot from the scene. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals who did attend. For example, in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, officials followed and harassed a prominent pastor and his family after he met with the Consul General from Chengdu. On at least three occasions during the year security officials threatened Tibetan Buddhist leaders and forced them to cancel meetings with high-level U.S. government visitors to southwest China at the last minute. In one instance, in April they interrogated a Tibetan Buddhist abbot and delayed his return to his home monastery in another province after authorities learned about his meeting with the Deputy Chief of Mission.

On December 11, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom said “the treatment of Muslims, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners over a long period were reasons to keep China as a Country of Particular Concern.

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 November 28, 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 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

The United States recognizes the Tibetan 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 citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" without defining "normal." Central government regulations implemented February 1 stipulate religious activity "must not harm national security" and place new restrictions on religious schools, donations, and travel. 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, torture, 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 leading to death in protest of government policies continued, and four individuals reportedly set themselves on fire and died during the year. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), reported in May torture, including sexual abuse of Tibetan Buddhist nuns, took place in a re-education camp in the TAR. According to TCHRD, authorities also subjected inmates to collective punishment, food and sleep deprivation, prolonged wall standing and beatings. According to local sources, during the year authorities continued an ongoing multi-year project to evict approximately 3,000 monks and nuns from Buddhist institutes at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, destroying as many as 1,500 of their residences and subjecting many of them to "patriotic and legal re-education." Authorities often justified their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by saying the religious institutions engaged in separatist or pro-independence activities, and undermined the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The government routinely denigrated the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists revered as their most important spiritual leader, and forbade Tibetans from venerating him and other religious leaders associated with him.

Some Tibetans continued to encounter societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, and traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources. Because expressions of Tibetan identity and religion were



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 people and to allow Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. In July during the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, the Vice President and Secretary of State met with Kusho Golog Jigme, a former Tibetan political prisoner, to highlight continued U.S. government support for religious freedom in Tibet. U.S. government officials expressed concerns to the Chinese government at senior 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 and also raised concerns about the continued disappearance of the Panchen Lama. While diplomatic access to the TAR remained tightly controlled, four U.S. visits occurred.

## **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 comprise the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. Outside 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; 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 and 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." 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 these 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 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 building and managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

The central government's State Council revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs became effective on February 1. The revisions require religious groups to register with the government, increase penalties by imposing fines on landlords 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 by submitting them to the same oversight as places of worship and impose new restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they can receive and restricting the publication of religious material to guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Additionally, the revisions require that religious activity "must not harm national security." While 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," leaving "extremism" undefined. These steps include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The new regulations also limit the online activities of religious groups, requiring such activities be approved by the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau.

A new policy, based on ideas discussed at the national-level Conference on Religion and Work in 2016 and introduced on August 31 in the TAR, requires Tibetan monks and nuns to undergo political training in state ideology. The policy requires monks and nuns to demonstrate – in addition to competence in religious studies – "political reliability," "moral integrity capable of impressing the public," and willingness to "play an active role at critical moments."

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 these 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 the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central government level, the CCP Central Committee's Central Tibet Work Coordination Group, the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD), and SARA are responsible for developing and implementing 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 officials 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 various types of punishment, including expulsion from the CCP.

### **Government Practices**

During the year, four Tibetans reportedly self-immolated as a means of protest against government policies, compared to six individuals in 2017. Some experts attributed reports of the decreasing number of self-immolations to tighter control measures by authorities. Sources said that during the year, authorities told family members not to discuss self-immolation cases. The NGO Free Tibet reported since 2009 more than 150 Tibetans had set themselves on fire in protest against what they said was occupation and human rights abuses on Tibet's religion and culture under Chinese rule. According to media reports, 16-year-old Gendun Gyatso self-immolated in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) County, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP) in Sichuan Province, on December 8 or 9 and died of his injuries. Media said that on December 8, Drugkho (reportedly also known by his monastic name

Choekyi Gyatso), a young Tibetan man, set himself on fire in Ngaba shouting, “long live the Dalai Lama.” Some news reports stated he may have survived. Reportedly, both Gendun and Drugkho were monks at Kirti Monastery. According to the website *Tibet Sun*, on November 4 in Ngaba, Dupo, another Tibetan youth, died after carrying out a self-immolation, reportedly shouting “Long live the Dalai Lama.” On March 7, Tsekho Tugchak (also spelled “Topchag”), a man in his forties, reportedly called out, “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama and freedom for Tibet” as he self-immolated in Meruma Township, Ngaba County; the location of his remains was unknown. Ngaba County had also been the site of numerous prior self-immolations by monks from the Kirti Monastery.

There were reports of the forced disappearance, torture, arbitrary arrest, and physical abuse of individuals on account of their religious beliefs or practices.

The whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetans, remained unknown since his 1995 forced disappearance by Chinese authorities. Nyima was six years old at the time he and his parents were reportedly abducted. Authorities did not provide information on his whereabouts, and stated previously that he was “living a normal life” and did “not wish to be disturbed.” The Panchen Lama was considered by the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism the second-most-prominent leader after the Dalai Lama.

The TCHRD, an NGO run and staffed by Tibetans in exile, reported in May a Tibetan monk’s account of torture and sexual abuse in a re-education camp in the TAR. According to TCHRD, the unnamed monk spent approximately four months in a re-education camp in Sog County of Naqchu (Chinese: Naqu) where he said all inmates, except for “two or three laypersons,” were monks and nuns. The monk said detainees had to attend self-criticism sessions and participate in military drills; detention officers also beat older monks and nuns who were physically weak and did not understand Chinese. The monk said, “Many nuns would lose consciousness during the [military] drills. Sometimes officers would take unconscious nuns inside where I saw them fondle the nuns’ breasts and grope all over their body.” He also stated some inmates “were singled out and beaten up so severely with electric batons that they would lose consciousness. The officers would revive the unconscious inmates by splashing water on their faces. This cycle of losing and reviving consciousness would go on for some time at the end of which the officers would use a black plastic pipe to beat and pour water on all parts of the body and then use electric batons to beat some more. Soon black and blue marks would appear on the victim’s body and render him or her half-dead.”

TCHRD reported authorities subjected inmates to torture and collective punishment, food deprivation, sleep deprivation, prolonged wall standing, and beatings.

According to *The Tibet Post*, Geshe Tsewang Namgyal, formerly a monk from Drago Monastery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, reported that authorities tortured him while he was in prison, resulting in permanent injuries to his legs. Authorities released Geshe Namgyal on January 24, after he completed his six-year prison term. Officials arrested him in 2012 for participating in a peaceful protest against China's policies in Tibet.

Limited access to information about prisoners made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of individuals imprisoned on account of their religious beliefs or affiliation, 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 4,037 records of Tibetan political prisoners, of whom 300 were known to be detained or imprisoned as of December 21. Of these, 131 were reported to be current or former monks, nuns, or Tibetan Buddhist reincarnate teachers. Of the 120 cases for which there was available information on sentencing, punishment ranged from two years' to life imprisonment. Observers, including commission staff, believed the actual number of Tibetan political prisoners and detainees to be much higher, but the lack of access to prisoners and prisons, as well as the lack of reliable official statistics, made a precise determination difficult. Authorities continued to hold an unknown number of persons in detention centers rather than prisons.

According to the NGO International Campaign for Tibet and other sources, on December 10, the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, police in Ngaba severely beat Sangay (also spelled "Sanggye") Gyatso, a monk from Kirti Monastery, as he protested for freedom for Tibet. Police detained him, and his whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

According to the NGO Canada Tibet Committee, in February local authorities detained Karma, a leader of Markor village in the TAR's Naqchu Prefecture, for challenging an official order to sign a document permitting local authorities to conduct mining activities at Sebtra Zagyen mountain. Local Tibetans consider Sebtra Zagyen a sacred location. The Canada Tibet Committee also carried a report by TCHRD that in April officials detained and beat approximately 30 Tibetans, at least two of whom were monks, after information about Karma's

detention leaked to the Tibetan exile community. According to local sources, Karma's whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

In May TAR authorities detained Gangye, a Tibetan man from Sog County, for possessing religious books written by the Dalai Lama and CDs featuring the religious leader's teachings, according to news portal *Phayul*. His whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

According to local religious community sources, between September 5 and September 9, security forces separately detained three Tibetan monks from Meruma. The monks were reportedly protesting against government policies, specifically the requirement for Tibetans to be at least 18 years old to become monks (historically children as young as toddlers began the process of study to become monks) and the government's interference in monastic management. On September 5, authorities detained Dorje Rabten of Kirti Monastery immediately following his protest. On September 6, they also detained Tenzin Gelek after he protested against Dorje's detention. Similarly, on September 9, officials took Lobsang Dargy into custody following his protest against the detention of both Dorje and Tenzin. Their whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

According to the Central Tibetan Administration, on January 28, authorities arrested and detained Lodoe Gyatso from Naqchu Prefecture of the TAR after he staged a peaceful protest in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Prior to the protest, Lodoe Gyatso published a video announcing his plans to organize a peaceful demonstration in support of the Tibetan people's commitment to world peace and nonviolence under the guidance of the Dalai Lama.

Radio Free Asia reported that in September authorities detained Tibetan monks Nyida, Kelsang, Nesang, and Choeje of Gomang Monastery in Ngaba TAP, Sichuan Province, for publicly protesting against a government housing project near their monastery. The four detainees were reportedly still in Khyungchu County's custody. A fifth monk was reportedly detained and released.

According to a February report by Radio Free Asia, at the end of 2017 authorities convicted Tashi Choeying, a Tibetan monk from Tawu (Chinese: Daofu) County of Kardze TAP in Sichuan Province, on an unknown charge and sentenced him to a six-year prison term. Authorities had held Tashi, who had studied in India, incommunicado since November 2016. Religious community sources said Tashi's conviction may have been due to his communications with the media in India about self-immolation cases in Tawu.

In June *Phayul* reported local officials raided the residences of two Tibetans from Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, and arrested the men for possessing photos of the Dalai Lama.

RFA reported in June that authorities released Lobsang Tenzin, formerly a monk at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, from prison three years before the end of his ten-year prison sentence. He had been jailed in 2011 for allegedly supporting a self-immolation protest.

Authorities continued to exercise strict controls over religious practice and maintained intrusive surveillance of many monasteries and nunneries, including through permanent installation of CCP and public security officials and overt camera surveillance systems at religious sites and monasteries.

Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to station CCP officials 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 2017. Security forces continued to block access to and from important monasteries during politically sensitive events and political religious anniversaries.

According to many contacts in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, officials placed family members, relatives, and close friends of self-immolators on a security watch list to prevent them from meeting and communicating with international visitors and, in some cases, deprived them of public benefits.

Authorities met with family members of individuals who had self-immolated and instructed them not to talk about the cases 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. After a self-immolation in December, authorities reportedly instituted a “clampdown” on the area and blocked internet communication.

The government continued to control the approval process of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and supervision of their religious education.



According to local sources, while high-ranking religious leaders and local Tibetan Buddhists attempted to search for the reincarnation of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a prominent Tibetan religious leader who died in prison in 2015, security officials closely monitored their efforts and threatened them with imprisonment if the religious leaders continued their search.

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, whom authorities had disappeared that same year. 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 Gyaltzen Norbu, and ordered every Tibetan family in Lhako (Shannan) city to send family members to an August teaching session to ensure hundreds of thousands of people paid him respect. In 1995, authorities installed Gyaltzen Norbu in Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse (Chinese: Xigaze), the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, and visited the monastery every summer since.

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 that, as part of authorities' interference 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. Religious leaders and scholars said these and other means of interference continued to cause them concern about the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations.

According to media reports, as of December 2017, the government added seven additional "living buddhas" below the age of 16 to the 2017 list of more than 1,300 approved "living buddhas." Such individuals reportedly continued to undergo training on patriotism and the CCP'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 continued to place restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions. According to local sources, at Larung Gar, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, site of the world's largest Tibetan Buddhist institute, the

government continued its program of evicting monks and nuns that began in 2016. During the year, the government evicted approximately 2,000 monks and nuns from a population that was at least 20,000 in 2016 and demolished an estimated 900 residences, leaving the remaining population at approximately 5,000, according to Human Rights Watch and a local source. Monks and nuns evicted from the institute returned to their hometowns where the source said they were unable to receive “quality religious education” free from government interference. 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.

In January Human Rights Watch described the Chinese government’s interference at Larung Gar as an “extreme control over religious practices,” “an immediate threat to the religious freedom of all Tibetans,” and “a long-term threat to all Chinese.” The organization also noted “the scale of the Communist Party’s intervention at Larung Gar is unprecedented.”

According to local sources, during the year, authorities continued their program of destroying residences at another Buddhist complex at Yachen Gar, also in Kardze Prefecture. During the year, authorities destroyed at least 700 residences and evicted approximately 1,000 monks and nuns from a 2016 estimated population of 10,000 religious practitioners in Yachen Gar. At year’s end, a local source estimated the remaining population to be approximately 5,000. Local sources reported that authorities prohibited monks and nuns from Yachen Gar, who returned to their hometowns in the TAR, from joining any other monastery or nunnery there or participating in any public religious practices.

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.

In many areas, authorities reportedly forced monks and nuns under the age of 18 to leave their monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.” According to local sources, from 2017 on authorities removed nearly 1,000 minors from various monasteries in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. According to other reports, authorities removed 600 minors from Litang Monastery (also known as the Ganden Thubchen Choekhorling Monastery, the largest Buddhist monastery in Litang, Sichuan Province. Authorities removed 20 monks from Jowo Ganden Shedrub Palgyeling monastery in Kham and on July 10 authorities removed as many as 200 young monks from Dza Serssul monastery.

Sources also reported from March to July, in Kyewu Township, Serssul (Chinese: Shiqu) County, Kardze TAP, 77 minors were removed from monasteries. To facilitate the removal of minors, authorities threatened the parents, other family members, and acquaintances, telling them they risked losing social benefits and government jobs if they did not comply with official orders.

In July media reported the government banned all underage students in the TAR from participating in religious activities during the summer holidays. School officials required students to sign an agreement stating they would not participate in any form of religious activity during the summer.

The Education Affairs Committee, the Municipal People’s Government, and the Municipal Education Bureau of the TAR issued an order banning parents from taking their children to monasteries or allowing children to participate in religious events during the Saka Dawa festival in May, according to media reports. Reportedly, authorities also encouraged parents not to participate in the festivities or go to monasteries. The government also required schools to inform the education bureau of students who were absent during the month and taking part in the festival.

On August 31, government officials conducted a political training session for a select group of Tibetan monks and nuns in Lhasa from May 31 to June 2. The training session aimed to strengthen participants’ political beliefs and prepare them to spread the ideology of the central government in their own monasteries and communities. The government did not disclose the number of participants, but according to Human Rights Watch, a 2016 political training course for 250 Tibetan monks and nuns was reportedly the pilot program for this training session.

In December *Global Times* reported authorities in the TAR launched the opening session of a five-year training program for Tibetan Buddhism teaching staff,

including local Tibetan Buddhists as well as monks and nuns. As part of the program, which aims to better adapt Tibetan Buddhism to socialist society, participants are required to study national policies, history, culture, laws, regulations, modern knowledge, and religious studies. A local CCP official reportedly said monks and nuns were “expected to firmly set up the concept that government power is higher than religious power, and that national laws are above religious rules.” The launch of this program coincided with the launch of another training course specifically for government officials assigned to Tibetan temples. Officials are required to take part in a three-year training course to manage temples and “better serve” monks and nuns in conducting religious affairs in accordance to laws and regulations.

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. The TAR regional government punished CCP members who followed the Dalai Lama, secretly harbored religious beliefs, made pilgrimages to India, or sent their children to study with exiled Tibetans.

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 April TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie continued to call for monks and nuns in the region to fight against the “Dalai clique and defend the unity of the motherland.” In May Wu continued to instruct various party and government organs that they “must resolutely implement the central government's principles and policies on the Dalai clique’s struggle, carry out in-depth anti-secession struggles, and ensure political security.” 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.

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 nearly all Tibetan Buddhists recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama. Punishments in certain counties inside the TAR for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included expulsion from monasteries and criminal prosecution.

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 such 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 83rd 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 times. According to local sources, Sichuan and Gansu provincial authorities patrolled major monasteries in Tibetan areas and warned that those holding special events or celebrations would face severe consequences. Local sources reported that in July religious affairs officials instructed senior monks at Draggo and Tawu Monasteries in Kardze TAP not to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday. As a result, the monks did not organize any public celebrations. Sources reported they feared repercussions from the government for defying orders, including fear of death. Officials in Gansu Province met with senior monks from Labrang Monastery and Bora Monastery, and also instructed them not to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday publicly, according to sources. Authorities warned the monks would face legal consequences for their actions, but did not specify what the consequences were.

Authorities deployed the military to monitor prayer festivals in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. During Lunar New Year celebrations in February, multiple local sources reported the authorities, among other measures, deployed military forces at prayer ceremonies at Drepung, Sera, and Gandan Monasteries in the TAR, Draggo and Tawu Monasteries in Sichuan Province, and Kirti and Kumbum (Chinese: Ta'er) Monasteries in Qinghai Province. Authorities hosted a series of meetings in Lhasa instructing monks and nuns to comply with party policy and inspected "armed forces" and CCP officials at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. In September the government banned the annual Dechen Shedrub prayer festival from occurring in Larung Gar, citing overcrowding and unfinished reconstruction. The ban marked the third consecutive year the government did not allow the 21-year-old festival to take place.

The TAR government reportedly 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 Naqchu and Chamdo (Chinese: 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 attire to avoid such harassment when traveling outside their monasteries and around the country.

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline as many top Buddhist teachers remained in exile or died in India or elsewhere; 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 Khatok Getse Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Kyabje Menr Trizin – all resided in exile. The government also banned India-trained Tibetan monks, most of whom received their education from the Dalai Lama or those with ties to the leader, from teaching in Tibetan monasteries in China. In May *India Today* reported Zhu Weiqun, the former head of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, said it was necessary to tighten supervision so monks educated abroad by the “Dalai clique” did not use “local Buddhists to conduct separatist activities.”

Multiple sources also reported that during the past four years the Chinese government increasingly restricted Tibetan Buddhist monks from visiting Chinese cities to teach or to meet with international contacts. Authorities also restricted Tibetans’ travel inside China, particularly for Tibetans residing outside the TAR who wished to visit the TAR, during sensitive periods, including Losar (Tibetan New Year), the Saga Dawa festival, and the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising.

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. According to a Human Rights Watch annual report, several hundred Tibetans traveling on Chinese passports to attend a teaching session by the Dalai Lama in January were forced to return. In December Chinese authorities refused to grant Tibetans new passports or confiscated issued passports in an attempt to block their travel to India and Nepal to attend the Dalai Lama's teaching sessions. As a result there was a large reduction in the number of China-based Tibetans attending the teaching compared to previous years. 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, which 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 government prohibited construction of new temples without prior approval. 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. In August Wu Yingjie, the TAR Party Secretary instructed party members "to adhere to China's Sinicization of religion, and independence and self-determination should be the guidance principles for those in the Tibetan Buddhism community." Wu said, "We will expose the reactionary nature of the 14th Dalai Lama and the 'Dalai clique,' as well as educate and guide the vast majority of the monks and nuns and religious followers to oppose separatism in order to safeguard the unity of the motherland and ethnic unity."

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.” General administrative affairs in TAR monasteries, which monks traditionally managed, 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. During the year, a local source said the CCP had appointed 100 percent of monastic management in Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province, including Kirti Monastery. In January Human Rights Watch reported a 2017 official document said scores of CCP officials would be installed at every level and in each section of the monastic settlement at Larung Gar. The officials “will hold nearly half of the positions on most committees and in most offices, and in most cases will occupy the top positions.” According to the document, six “sub-area management units” that supervise the monks would each be headed by a CCP official rather than a monk.

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 TAR CCP committee and government required all monasteries to display prominently the Chinese flag and the portraits of five CCP chairmen from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping.

According to local sources, authorities continued to hinder 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.

In some cases, authorities continued to enforce 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 a Radio Free Asia report confirmed by several hotels.

On December 12, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China issued a report on what it said was the "progress in human rights" over the previous 40 years. The report said, "[r]eligious beliefs and normal religious activities are protected by law. At the moment Tibet Autonomous Region has 1,778 venues for practicing Tibetan Buddhism, and some 46,000 resident monks and nuns. Tibet now has 358 Living Buddhas, more than 60 of whom have been confirmed through historical conventions and traditional religious rituals. By 2017 a total of 84 monks from Tibet had received senior academic titles in Lhasa and 168 in Beijing."

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

Because expressions of Tibetan 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.

According to local sources, in November 13 monks from Kirti Monastery were in Chengdu for scheduled medical examinations, but they missed the appointment. Taxi drivers were not willing to serve them because they were Tibetan monks. Young Tibetan entrepreneurs in Chengdu reported Chinese companies often denied them employment opportunities once the employers identified them in person as ethnic Tibetans, despite prior offers of employment when discussions had taken place solely by phone.

Many Han Buddhists continued to demonstrate interest in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, according to local sources in such 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 Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Consul General and other officers in the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu, and officers at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing continued sustained and concerted efforts to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

In July, during the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, the Vice President and Secretary of State highlighted the severe repression and discrimination Tibetan Buddhists face due to their beliefs. They met with Kusho Golog Jigme, a former Tibetan political prisoner, to highlight continued U.S. support for religious freedom in Tibet and also expressed concerns regarding the Chinese government's longstanding efforts to suppress Tibetan Buddhists' religious, linguistic, and cultural identities. In his opening remarks at the ministerial, the Vice President said, "For nearly 70 years, the Tibetan people have been brutally repressed by the Chinese government. Kusho was jailed and tortured after he spoke out against the Chinese rule in his homeland. While he escaped China, his people's fight to practice their religion and protect their culture goes on. I say to Kusho, we are honored by your presence and we admire your courage and your stand for liberty."

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. U.S. officials underscored only faith leaders can decide on the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and also raised concerns about the continued disappearance of the Panchen Lama. 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 and sought increased access to the TAR for U.S. officials, journalists and tourists.

In November the Consul General in Chengdu met with Lhasa Party Secretary and Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the TAR's People Congress Baima Wangdui. 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 senior levels regarding severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans' ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights.

The Consul General called for the TAR government to respect the Tibetan people's right to practice their religion freely in his engagement with Chinese officials.

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 two U.S. consular visits in April and October, and two embassy and Consulate General in Chengdu official visits in May and November. U.S. officials emphasized to TAR officials during their November visit the importance of respecting religious freedom in Tibet.

## XINJIANG 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

### Executive Summary

This separate section on Xinjiang is included given the scope and severity of reported religious freedom violations specific to the region this year.

Multiple media and NGOs estimated the government detained at least 800,000 and up to possibly more than 2 million Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other Muslim groups, mostly Chinese citizens, in specially built or converted detention facilities in Xinjiang and subjected them to forced disappearance, torture, physical abuse, and prolonged detention without trial because of their religion and ethnicity since April 2017. There were reports of deaths among detainees. Authorities maintained extensive and invasive security and surveillance, in part to gain information regarding individuals' religious adherence and practices. 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. The reported intensification of detentions accompanied authorities' implementation of a Xinjiang counterextremism regulation, enacted in March 2017, which identified many of the behaviors deemed "extremist," as well as continued implementation of the National Counterterrorism Law, revised during 2018, which addressed "religious extremism." In October the Standing Committee of the 12th People's Congress in Xinjiang revised its regulation to insert guidance on "vocational skill education training centers." Authorities in Xinjiang punished schoolchildren, university students, and their family members for praying and barred youths from participating in religious activities, including fasting, during Ramadan. The government sought the forcible repatriation of Uighur Muslims from foreign countries and detained some of those who returned.

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

Embassy officials met with government officials regarding the treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. According to a statement issued at the July 24-26 U.S. government-hosted Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, "We are particularly troubled by reports of the Chinese government's deepening crackdown on Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups... [including] the detention of hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, in facilities ranging

from makeshift holding centers to prisons, ostensibly for political re-education,” in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. There are reports of deaths in these facilities. We call on the Chinese government to release immediately all those arbitrarily detained.” On September 21, the Secretary of State said, “Uighurs are held against their will in so-called reeducation camps where they’re forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated.” On December 21, in discussing why China remained a Country of Particular Concern, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom said what is happening to Muslim Uighurs is one of the “worst human rights situations in the world.” In October the then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations said, “In China, the government is engaged in the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities that is straight out of George Orwell.” She added, “It is the largest internment of civilians in the world today” and “It may be the largest since World War II.”

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

A 2015 report on Xinjiang issued by the State Council Information Office (SCIO) states Uighur, Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14.2 million residents in Xinjiang, or 61 percent of the total Xinjiang population. Uighur Muslims live primarily in Xinjiang.

## **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 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.

Xinjiang has its own counterterrorism law containing similar provisions regarding “religious extremism” as the national law. The law bans the wearing of long beards, full-face coverings, expanding halal practice beyond food, and

“interfering” with family planning, weddings, funerals, or inheritance, among other provisions.

In November SCIO published a report on cultural protection and development in Xinjiang that said the government promotes the use of standard Chinese language by law, issues religious texts published and distributed according to the law, and provides “important legal protection for the diverse cultural heritage of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang.”

In October the Xinjiang regional government issued implementing regulations for the counterterrorism law to permit the establishment of “vocational skill education training centers” (which the government also calls “education centers” and “education and transformation establishments”) to “carry out anti-extremist ideological education.” The revised regulations stipulate, “Institutions such as vocational skill education training centers should carry out training sessions on the common national language, laws and regulations, and vocational skills, and carry out anti-extremist ideological education, and psychological and behavioral correction to promote thought transformation of trainees, and help them return to the society and family.”

On October 9, The Standing Committee of the 13th People’s Congress of Xinjiang announced that the regional government maintains the right to uphold the basic principles of the party’s religious work, adhere to the rule of law, and actively guide religion to adapt to the socialist society. It states, “The judicial administrative department shall organize, guide, and coordinate the propaganda work of relevant laws and regulations, strengthen prison management, prevent the spread of extremism in prisons, and do relevant remolding, education, and transformation.”

Regulations in Urumqi, Xinjiang, prohibit veils that cover the face, homeschooling children, and “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.”

Authorities in Xinjiang have defined 26 religious activities, including some practices of Islam, Christianity, and Tibetan Buddhism, as illegal without government authorization. These regulations 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. It also bans editing, translation, publication, printing, reproduction, production, distribution, sale, and dissemination of religious publications and audiovisual products without authorization.

Xinjiang officials require minors to complete nine years of compulsory education before they may receive religious education outside of school. Xinjiang regulations also 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 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. Xinjiang’s regional version of the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law states children affected by ethnic separatism, extremism and terrorism, and/or committing offenses that seriously endanger the society but do not constitute a criminal punishment may be sent to “specialized schools for correction” at the request of their parents, guardians or school. Xinjiang authorities continued to ban giving children any name with an Islamic connotation.

### **Government Practices**

According to media and NGO reports, since April 2017 the government in Xinjiang continued to cite concerns over the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as reasons to have detained an estimated 800,000 to two million Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other majority Muslim groups, mostly Chinese citizens, in prison-like conditions. According to a July ChinaAid article, Christians were also detained in the same facilities. There were reports of deaths in detention and disappearances. The government targeted individuals for detention based primarily on their ethnic and religious identities, and detainees were reportedly subjected to forms of torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment, including sexual abuse. Police raids and the government’s restrictions on Islamic practices as part of “strike hard” campaigns, which began in 2014, continued throughout the year. Local observers said, however, many incidents related to abuses or pressure on Uighurs went unreported to international media or NGOs.

According to Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), two Uighur religious scholars, Muhammad Salih Hajim and Abdulnehed Mehsum, died in detention

camps. Authorities detained Hajim in late 2017, along with several members of his family, and in January UHRP learned of his death. UHRP reported that Mehsum died while in detention in Hotan in November 2017, but his death was not made public until May.

In August *The Guardian* reported local sources told a reporter that a Uighur named Karim had been jailed and “died after prolonged heavy labor.” He had lived in Muslim-majority countries and owned a Uighur restaurant in a major Chinese city.

On November 28, Mihrigul Tursun, said that while in detention, she saw nine women of the 68 who shared a cell with her die over the course of 3 months.

There were also reports of suicides. A Uighur advocacy group reported that more than 10 Uighur women committed suicide during the year in direct response to pressure or abuses by authorities. Reportedly, officials came to their homes and said either the women had to marry a Han Chinese man or the officials would take their parents into detention. To prevent this, the women committed suicide.

*The New York Times*, Radio Free Asia, and UHRP reported on the disappearance of several Uighur academics and university administrators during the year. A report released by UHRP in October identified 231 Uighur intellectuals authorities had caused to disappear, removed from their post, imprisoned, or sent to detention facilities.

In October UHRP said Uighur literature professors Abdukerim Rahman, Azat Sultan, and Gheyretjan Osman, language professor Arslan Abdulla, and poet Abdulqadir Jalaleddin had disappeared and were believed to be held in detention facilities.

Radio Free Asia reported in September that two Kashgar University administrators (Erkin Omer, Muhter Abdughopur) and two professors (Qurban Osman and Gulnar Obul) had been removed from their positions and their whereabouts were unknown.

International media reported former president of Xinjiang University Tashpolat Tiyip and former president of Xinjiang Medical University Hospital Halmurat Ghopur separately received two-year suspended death sentences.

In August *The New York Times* reported Uighur academic Rahile Dawut, from Xinjiang, who had lectured and written extensively on Uighur culture, disappeared



sometime after telling a relative of her intent to travel to Beijing from Urumqi in late 2017. Her family and friends said she was secretly detained as part of the government's crackdown on Uighurs.

In March Toronto's *The Globe and Mail* interviewed Nurgul Sawut, a clinical social worker in Canberra who said at least 12 of her family members disappeared in Xinjiang since the beginning of the year. Sawut also stated 54 relatives and close friends in Xinjiang of one couple in Australia had disappeared and were presumably in detention facilities. The article said more than 30 members of the family of Rebiya Kadeer, an activist and former president of the World Uyghur Congress, vanished or were being detained. Gulchehra Hoja, a broadcaster with the Uighur service of Radio Free Asia, stated that more than 20 of her relatives were missing and the government was responsible. The article also reported that Adalet Rahim of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, said a brother and six cousins were in forced indoctrination programs. Her father, Abdulaziz Sattar, said some 50 of his relatives – among them bureaucrats, teachers, and a medical doctor – had been incarcerated in Xinjiang.

Associated Press reported the continued disappearance of 16-year-old Uighur Pakzat Qurban, who arrived at the Urumqi airport from Istanbul on his way to visit his grandmother in 2016.

There were numerous reports of authorities subjecting detained individuals to torture and other physical abuse.

In October ChinaAid reported first-hand accounts of a three-part system to which Uighurs were subjected in several detention facilities. According to local residents, each camp consists of areas A, B, and C. Guards first placed “newcomers and Muslims” in C, the worst area, where guards deprived them of food or water for 24 hours. Guards shackled their hands and feet, beat them, and screamed insults at them until they repeatedly thanked the CCP and President Xi Jinping. Then the guards transferred them to area B, where they ate poor quality food and were permitted to use the bathroom. They went outside for 15 minutes every day to sing the national anthem. Guards then moved those considered successfully re-educated in Communist Party beliefs to area A, where the conditions were better.

The September Human Rights Watch (HRW) report titled *Eradicating Ideological Viruses* contained an account from a detention center in Xinjiang where detainees described interrogations and torture, including beatings, staff hanging detainees

from ceilings and walls, and prolonged shackling. Detainees also reported being kept in spaces so overcrowded there was no room for all to sleep. One detainee said fellow detainees feared torture when being removed from their cells for interrogations, and one showed him scars after guards hanged the detainee from the ceiling. After being left hanging for a night, he said he would agree to anything. One individual said guards chained him to a bed so at most he could only sit and stand in one place. Guards told him that they would treat detainees the same way that they treat murderers. They also said there was a Xinjiang-wide order that all Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs would have their feet shackled and their hands chained together with just five to six “rings” apart, making movement very difficult.

In May ChinaAid reported an 87-year-old ethnic Kazakh man said he was tortured in a Uighur detention facility in Xinjiang. He said authorities blasted noise from a high-pitched speaker, causing many inmates to slip into comas. He also said authorities forced Muslims to drink poor quality alcohol and eat pork, practices against their religious beliefs. Another ethnic Kazakh with knowledge of the situation said prison officials forced detainees to wear a special helmet that played noise for 21 hours per day, causing many to suffer mental breakdowns.

In September *The Guardian* reported that Kairat Samarkand, an ethnic Kazakh Muslim who had been detained outside Karamagay for nearly four months, said he was forced to wear an outfit of “iron clothes” that consisted of claws and rods that left him immobile with his hands and legs outstretched. He said guards forced him to wear it for 12 hours one day after he refused to make his bed. According to Samarkand, guards told him that there is no religion, and that the government and the party would take care of him. Samarkand told *The Washington Post* that guards in detention facilities would handcuff and ankle cuff detainees who disobeyed rules for up to 12 hours, and would subject detainees to waterboarding.

In July ChinaAid reported guards forced a woman in a detention facility to take unknown medication and her hair fell out. The woman said prison authorities handcuffed detainees and made them wear 44 pounds of armor for three-12 hours per day. Guards also shaved off Uighur women’s hair, which some of the women considered sacred. Helatti Shamarkhan, a former inmate, said he saw detainees being forcibly vaccinated and medicated.

In September HRW reported that a former detainee said authorities put him in a small solitary confinement cell measuring approximately 2 by 2 meters (43 square

feet). They did not give the detainee any food or drink, handcuffed him in the back, and forced him to stand for 24 hours without sleep.

NGOs and international media reported arrests and detentions of Muslims in Xinjiang for “untrustworthy behavior” such as attending religious education courses, possessing books about religion and Uighur culture, wearing clothing with Islamic symbols, and traveling to certain counties. There were also reports of authorities holding children in orphanages after their parents were taken to internment camps.

*The Economist* reported authorities in Xinjiang used detailed information to rank citizens’ “trustworthiness” using various criteria. Officials deemed people as trustworthy, average, or untrustworthy depending on how they fit into the following categories: were 15 to 55 years old (i.e., of military age); were Uighur; were unemployed; had religious knowledge; prayed five times a day; had a passport; had visited one of 26 countries; had ever overstayed a visa; had family members in a foreign country (there are at least 10,000 Uighurs in Turkey); and home schooled their children. *The Economist* said “...the catalogue is explicitly racist: people are suspected merely on account of their ethnicity.” Being labelled “untrustworthy” could lead to being detained by authorities. HRW reported the 26 “sensitive countries” were Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

International media reported the government issued guidelines warning officials to look out for 75 “signs” or behaviors that signified religious extremism. These guidelines included growing a beard, praying in public outside of mosques, and abstaining from smoking or drinking alcohol. Radio Free Asia reported in November that government authorities in Hotan, Xinjiang, were using an expanded set of guidelines that included additional behaviors, such as how people stood during prayer and dying hair red with henna. According to another source, authorities considered red hair a sign of affiliation with extremist religious groups because some individuals say the Prophet Mohammad had red hair. Radio Free Asia reported that officials threatened individuals who did not comply with the list of proscribed behaviors with detention. Authorities also pressured students to report information on their family’s religious practices to their teachers, who would then pass the information to security officials.

In July the NGO China Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) published a report saying that, based on Chinese government data, criminal arrests in Xinjiang accounted for 21 percent of all arrests in China in 2017, while the population of Xinjiang comprised less than 2 percent of China's overall population. CHRD reported the ratio of arrests in Xinjiang increased by more than 300 percent during the 2013-2017 period compared with 5 percent in preceding years. CHRD reported that, although the government does not provide an ethnic breakdown of the arrests, "...criminal punishment would disproportionately target the Uyghur Muslim group based on their percentage of the population."

On July 25, CHRD reported officials in a Xinjiang village detained the local imam and forced him to provide his students' names. Soon thereafter, authorities detained a carpenter in the village because he had attended Quranic studies classes 10 years previously.

On September 8, the *New York Times* reported that Abdusalam Muhemet said police in Xinjiang detained him for reciting a verse of the Quran at a funeral. Xinjiang residents said authorities detained people for visiting relatives abroad, possessing books about religion and Uighur culture, and even for wearing a T-shirt with a Muslim crescent. The article said the goal of these actions was to remove any devotion to Islam.

HRW reported a witness said he knew "three restaurant owners ... [who] ran 'Islamic' restaurants – they got detained because they don't allow smoking or drinking in their restaurants.... [The authorities] are banning everything Islamic." A former detainee stated that authorities in the detention centers did not allow people to say "*as-salaam alaikum*," a religious greeting, but instead forced them to speak Mandarin only. The detainee also stated that if he used Turkic language words, officials would punish him.

In September *The Associated Press* reported Gulzar Seley and her infant son, Uighurs who lived in Istanbul and returned to Xinjiang to visit family, were imprisoned. According to Seley's husband, who remained behind in Istanbul, authorities detained Seley shortly after she arrived at the airport in Urumqi and took her to her hometown, Karamay. Upon being released for a short period, she called her husband in Istanbul to tell him she and her son would not be coming back because she did not have time. She then disappeared, but her husband said he later learned she and their son were in jail.

According to *The Guardian*, in June police in Urumqi sentenced Guli, an ethnic Kazakh woman from Kazakhstan, to 15 days detention for not having her identification with her. Local authorities had previously interrogated her, citing reports that she wore a hijab and prayed. Guli described her detention facility as a long, single-story building that held approximately 230 women. She said inside the detention center, guards forced women to sing patriotic songs for two hours on most days, memorize a 10-point disciplinary code, and undergo self-criticism sessions. One woman told Guli she was there because police had found a “happy Eid” message on her phone. Authorities released Guli after eight days and sent her back to Kazakhstan.

Under a policy launched in 2017, authorities in Xinjiang built “welfare centers” aimed at providing orphans with state-sponsored care until they turn 18. According to a July *Financial Times* report, a former teacher in detention facilities said detainees’ children were sent to “welfare centers” as they were forbidden to attend school with “normal” children because their parents had political problems. The same article said public tenders issued by local governments since 2017 indicated “dozens” of orphanages were being built. One county in Kashgar built 18 new orphanages in 2017 alone, according to local media.

Radio Free Asia reported in July and September that authorities placed children whose parents were in detention facilities in “Little Angel Schools.” The reports described the schools as surrounded by walls topped with barbed wire. Reports on the ages of children held varied, and some said children from six months to 14 years were being held, and were not allowed to go out due to security concerns. Reportedly, one worker at a regional orphanage in southern Xinjiang told Radio Free Asia his facility was seriously overcrowded with children “locked up like farm animals in a shed.” He said, with the overcrowding, authorities “are moving children to mainland China,” although he was unsure of where they were being sent. He added that “it isn’t possible” for parents released from detention to look for their children in orphanages. The CCP Secretary for Hotan Prefecture’s Keriye County said approximately 2,500 children were being held in two newly constructed buildings. International media and NGOs reported the government restricted individuals’ ability to engage in religious practices and forced Muslims in Xinjiang to perform activities inconsistent with their religious beliefs.

*The New York Times* reported in September that officials in Hotan set very narrow limits on the practice of Islam, including a prohibition on praying at home if there were friends or guests present. Residents said police sometimes searched homes

for forbidden books and items such as prayer mats, using special equipment to check walls and floors for hidden caches.

ChinaAid reported that on February 17, authorities in Yili, Xinjiang, ordered Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs to destroy the Islamic star and crescent symbol on all gravesites. Otherwise, authorities would forcibly demolish the graves. *Bitter Winter*, an online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China, reported government officials monitored funeral services in Xinjiang and prohibited Muslims from commemorating their dead according to their faith traditions. In February armed police officers detain Ezimet, a Uighur CCP member from Kashgar City, for performing an Islamic funeral prayer at his mother's burial ceremony several years previously. As of year's end, Ezimet remained in custody in an undisclosed location. Authorities also implicated his wife and child, and forced them to study government policy.

Radio Free Asia reported in June that authorities in Xinjiang affiliated with the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps were building nine "burial management centers," which included crematoria, in areas with high Uighur populations. Members of the Uighur exile community said authorities were using the centers to remove the religious context from funerary rites. According to the article, other members of the exile community said "authorities use the crematoria to secretly 'deal with' the bodies of Uyghurs who have been killed by security forces during protests against ... religious repression... or who have died under questionable circumstances in re-education camps." The article cited a source who said "very few" ethnic corpses brought to his crematorium in Kuchar (Kuche) county came from the "re-education camps." The source said the corpses of ethnic minorities brought to his crematorium are "normally brought to us with special documentation provided by police."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to deny international media reports stating authorities banned Uighur Muslims from Ramadan fasting, and said the constitution provided for religious freedom for Uighurs. 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 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. According to *The Independent*, authorities required mandatory 24-hour shifts for local government employees, and mandatory sports activities and patriotic film sessions for students on Fridays

throughout the month. 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.

There were reports of authorities prohibiting students from the middle school level through to the university level from fasting during Ramadan.

According to Radio Free Asia, 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 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 options. According to an official media report in *Global Times*, approximately 11,500 Chinese Muslims were expected to make the Hajj pilgrimage during the year, compared to 12,800 in 2017. Approximately 3,300 of them were to receive GPS tracking devices as part of a pilot program allowing the IAC to monitor their location in real time throughout the pilgrimage. According to the manufacturer, SARA and IAC jointly designed the device. In 2016 IAC reported that Saudi Arabia imposed an annual quota on the number of pilgrims from China that was lower than those for other countries. 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 IAC 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 IAC'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.

In September HRW reported authorities began requiring everyone in a village in Xinjiang to gather for a weekly Chinese flag-raising ceremony. On one occasion, police hit an elderly woman, telling her to take off her headscarf. Authorities confiscated prayer mats and copies of the Quran. Village authorities prohibited children from learning about religion, even at home.

In February ChinaAid reported that officials forced Muslims in Xinjiang to take part in traditional methods of celebration for the Chinese Lunar New Year, despite conflicts with Islam. According to an ethnic Kazakh man, authorities forced ethnic Kazakhs and Uighurs in Xinjiang to eat pork dumplings – a violation of Islamic dietary restrictions. If they refused, public security staff detained them on the spot.

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 against their will in ceremonies wearing traditional Han Chinese clothing, performing tai chi, and singing the national anthem. HRW reported in September that in Xinjiang, officials required individuals to attend political indoctrination meetings and, for some, Mandarin classes.

On December 12, the SCIO issued a report on what it said was the progress of human rights over 40 years. The report said the state offered training sessions to clerics on interpreting scriptures and, since 2011, the National Religious Affairs Administration had trained several hundred Islamic clerics from Xinjiang. The central government supported the Xinjiang Islamic Institute.

Authorities in Xinjiang maintained extensive and invasive security and surveillance, reportedly in part to gain information regarding individuals’ religious adherence and practices.

HRW reported the government required all individuals in Xinjiang to have a spyware app on their mobile phone because the government considered “web cleansing” necessary to prevent access to terrorist information. Failing to install the app, which could identify whom people called, track online activity, and record social media use, was deemed an offense. The reported stated that “Wi-Fi sniffers” in public places monitored all networked devices in range.

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 sensitive content.

In September HRW stated that in Xinjiang, officials used questionnaires to examine people's everyday behavior, inputting the results into a large-scale data analysis program. According to HRW, any indications of religious piety, along with "storing lots of food in one's home" or owning fitness equipment, could be construed as signs of "extremism." HRW said the government's religious restrictions had become so stringent that it had "effectively outlawed the practice of Islam."

At the end of December 2017, HRW reported a continuing effort of authorities in Xinjiang to collect DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood types of all residents in the region between the ages of 12 and 65. This campaign significantly expanded authorities' collection of biometric data beyond previous government efforts in the region, which were limited to biometric information from passport applicants.

According to *The New York Times*, authorities collected DNA samples, face-scans, voice recordings, and fingerprints of individuals in Xinjiang after saying they were receiving a free health check, but authorities refused to provide the results of the "check." In patent applications filed in 2013 and 2017, government researchers said they took genetic material from Uighurs and compared it with DNA from other ethnic groups, and were able to sort people by ethnicity. Human rights groups and Uighur activists said collecting genetic material was a key part of the government's campaign in Xinjiang. They said the government would compile the information into a comprehensive DNA database used to track any Uighurs who resisted conforming to the government's wishes.

According to an HRW report released in September, an individual who spent months in detention facilities in Xinjiang said in May that guards watched the inmates through video cameras, forcing everyone to remain still until a voice came from the speakers telling detainees they could relax for a few minutes. Guards also watched when inmates went to the bathroom. The same report detailed how the government extended surveillance to life outside the camps. A woman who left Xinjiang in 2017 told HRW that five officials took turns watching over her at home, documenting that they had checked on her. According to the report, the government officials appeared in photographs reading political propaganda

together and preparing a bed to stay overnight. The report said having male cadres stay overnight in homes with female inhabitants caused women and girls to be vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Throughout Ramadan, authorities in Hotan Prefecture assigned 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.”

In May CNN reported that authorities had dispatched more than one million Communist officials from other parts of the country to live with local families in Xinjiang. The report stated the government instituted these home stays to target farmer households in southern Xinjiang, where authorities have been waging what the report called an unrelenting campaign against the forces of “terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.” The report also stated the government required families to provide detailed information on their personal lives and political views during the officials’ visits. Authorities also subjected families to political education from the live-in officials – whom the government had mandated to stay at least one week per month in some locations. The program started in 2014, according to CNN.

A local Xinjiang government statement online indicated officials had to inspect the homes in which they were staying for any religious elements or logos and instructed the officials to confiscate any such items they found.

On August 8, *The New York Times* reported that, in addition to the mass detentions in Xinjiang, authorities intensified the use of informers and expanded police surveillance, including installing cameras in some people’s homes.

In May *The Economist* reported that in Hotan, Xinjiang, there were police stations approximately every 300 meters (1000 feet). The article stated that the government referred to the stations as “convenience police stations.” The stations were part of a grid-management system similar to those Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo started when he was Party Secretary in Tibet from 2011 to 2016. In Xinjiang authorities divided each city into squares, with approximately 500 people in each square. Every square had a police station that monitored the inhabitants. The report adds that every village in Xinjiang had a similar type of “convenience police station.”

The same report detailed police activities at a large checkpoint on the edge of Hotan, where a police officer ordered all the passengers off the bus. The passengers (all Uighur) took turns in a booth, where officials scanned identity cards, took photographs and fingerprints, used newly installed iris-recognition technology, and forced women to take off their headscarves. The officials also forced young Uighurs to give authorities access to their phones in order to download their smart phone contents for later analysis.

The government restricted access to houses of worship. *The Economist* reported in May that in Hotan authorities closed neighborhood mosques, leaving a handful of large mosques open. The account stated that police forced worshippers to register with them before attending mosques. At the entrance to the largest mosque in Kashgar, the Idh Kha – a famous place of pilgrimage – two policemen sat underneath a banner saying “Love the party, love the country.” Inside, a member of the mosque’s staff held classes for local traders on how to be a good Communist. In Urumqi, the article stated that authorities knocked down minarets and Islamic crescents on the mosques that were permitted to remain open. Other reports said restrictions across Xinjiang that required worshippers to apply for mosque entry permits remained in place. According to a local source, authorities banned individuals under the age of 20 from attending religious services in mosques.

The government reportedly moved against human rights activists. Radio Free Asia reported that on August 16, police threatened prominent Hui Muslim poet Cui Haixin (whose pen name is An Ran), after he tweeted about the mass incarceration of Uighurs in internment camps. According to Cui, five police officers raided his home and warned him not to use social media. Authorities had previously sent Cui to a weeklong re-education course in eastern China and briefly detained him in connection with his poetry and writings that referenced Xinjiang.

The government also reportedly restricted travel and sought to intimidate or forcibly repatriate Uighur and other Muslims abroad.

According to an HRW September report, individuals had to apply to the police for permission and proceed through numerous checkpoints to go from one town to the next in Xinjiang. HRW also reported that authorities recalled passports from people in the region and prohibited communication with individuals outside the country, including relatives. Ethnoreligious minorities also reported increased screening at airport, train station, and roadside security checkpoints.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in August that Chinese security officials told Uighurs living abroad to collect information on other Uighurs. Several Uighurs abroad reported the government denying their passport renewals and instead offering a one-way travel document back to China. Several individuals also reported authorities threatened to put family members of Uighurs living abroad into detention centers if they did not return.

HRW reported that in September an officer called an ethnic Turkic Muslim living in the United States and told him to return to China, threatening to abduct him if he refused. It may not be now, the officer said, “but this is just a matter of time.”

HRW reported in June that Chinese authorities contacted Murat, a 37-year-old student living outside the country whose sister was in a detention facility in China, telling her that even though she was in a foreign country, they could “manage” her. Murat stated that she did not join any terrorist organization or any organization against China or join any demonstrations.

According to a *Business Insider* report from August the government began compiling a database of its Muslim citizens living abroad. The article said authorities used intimidation tactics to obtain license plate numbers, bank details, and marriage certificate information from Uighur citizens in other countries.

In a March 28 article, *The Economist* cited reports issued by human rights groups saying authorities forced hundreds of Uighurs back to China in the past decade from Egypt, Thailand, Vietnam, and elsewhere. These groups said Chinese authorities in foreign countries had detained and interrogated individuals and several hundred were in foreign jails. Chinese officials often recruited local residents on both sides of the country’s southwestern borders and across Central Asia to report the arrival of “suspicious” individuals. *The Economist* report said the government frequently succeeded in having these individuals sent back without going through any official legal process.

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

Because the government and individuals closely link religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring and retaining their positions.

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.

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

Embassy officials routinely raised concerns the treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang with Chinese government officials. A statement issued to accompany the July 24-26 U.S. Government-hosted Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom said, “We are particularly troubled by reports of the Chinese government’s deepening crackdown on Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups...[including] the detention of hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, in facilities ranging from makeshift holding centers to prisons, ostensibly for political re-education,” in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. There are reports of deaths in these facilities. We call on the Chinese government to release immediately all those arbitrarily detained.” On September 21, the Secretary of State said, “Uighurs are held against their will in so-called reeducation camps where they’re forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated.” On December 21, while explaining why China remained designated on the list of Countries of Particular Concern, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom said what is happening to Muslim Uighurs is one of the “worst human rights situations in the world.” At the October 15 Chiefs of Defense Conference Dinner in Washington, the then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations said, “In China, the government is engaged in the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities that is straight out of George Orwell.” She added, “It is the largest internment of civilians in the world today” and “It may be the largest since World War II.”

The embassy and consulates general delivered direct messaging about religious freedom in Xinjiang through social media posts on Weibo and WeChat. In a series of April messages, the embassy posted the Department of State Spokesperson’s criticism of the arrest of Uighur journalists’ family members in Xinjiang, driving a surge of engagement with Chinese online users on the issue of religious repression in Xinjiang. In July the embassy promoted the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington through social media posts advocating for religious freedom that stimulated online debate regarding the situation of Muslims in Xinjiang. The embassy and consulates general created messages for Ramadan and Eid featuring the Ambassador and Consuls General, and promoted Islamic holiday messages from the White House, the Secretary of State, and others. These messages sparked online engagement on the issue of religious freedom for

Muslims, and, in particular, for Xinjiang's ethnic minority Muslim populations. The embassy and consulates general created weekly social media content promoting tolerance for religious and ethnic diversity, generally by using examples from the United States to inspire discussion about religious freedom in China, including Xinjiang. The embassy continued to draw attention to specific cases of repression in Xinjiang, and while government censors often blocked such posts on Weibo and WeChat, the discussion continued on Twitter. The embassy's Twitter followers regularly engaged in open, Chinese-language discussions related to Xinjiang or that were critical of Chinese official positions.

Embassy and consulate general officials also engaged directly with Chinese audiences for discussions about religious freedom for Muslims. In July the embassy hosted a screening and discussion of a film about gender equality in Islamic society which explained the Islamic faith, the rituals of Ramadan, and wearing the hijab. In January a Guangzhou Consulate General officer spoke on freedom of religion, focusing on its role in ameliorating sources of terrorism, which led to an audience discussion about the role of Islam in China.

## HONG KONG 2018 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). Falun Gong practitioners reported generally being able to operate openly, however, they reported harassment from groups they said were connected to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and difficulty renting venues for large events, including from the SAR government. Falun Gong practitioners held a rally in October to raise awareness of what they said was 19 years of CCP persecution of the Falun Gong in the Mainland.

Some Hong Kong pastors' exchanges with Mainland counterparts reportedly were negatively affected by changed regulations on the Mainland. Religious leaders reported hosting and participating in interfaith activities, such as a local mosque and a Jewish synagogue maintaining regular interaction between religious leaders of each community.

The U.S. consulate general affirmed U.S. government support for protecting freedom of religion and belief in meetings with the government. 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 2018 estimate). According to SAR government statistics, there are more than one million followers of Buddhism and more than one million followers of Taoism; 480,000 Protestants; 379,000 Roman Catholics; 100,000 Hindus, and 12,000 Sikhs. According to the World Jewish Congress, about 2,500 Jews live in Hong Kong. According to a 2017 *South China Morning Post* article, there are approximately 25,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints residing in Hong Kong. SAR government statistics estimate the SAR has approximately 300,000 Muslims. Small communities of Baha'is 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 dozens of 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 may not 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, a group must prove to the satisfaction of the government that it is established solely for religious, charitable, social, or recreational reasons.



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 nongovernmental organizations (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. In August, in an ongoing Falun Gong lawsuit against the Hong Kong government to contest a requirement to obtain government approval for the display of posters, a court overturned government decisions to confiscate Falun Gong banners. Falun Gong practitioners said they suspected that the CCP funded private groups that harassed them at public events. Practitioners also reported continuing difficulties renting venues for large meetings and cultural events from both government and private facilities. According to Falun Gong practitioners, the Hong Kong government, which controls a significant number of large venues in the city, denied Falun Gong members' applications to rent venues, often telling practitioners that the venues were fully booked. Private venues also refused to rent space to the Falun Gong, which Falun Gong practitioners attributed to concerns about harassment by anti-Falun Gong groups that they believed were linked to the central government.

Falun Gong practitioners held a rally on October 1 to raise awareness of what they said was 19 years of CCP persecution of the Falun Gong in the Mainland. The Falun Gong reported that many local political leaders spoke at the rally to support their cause.

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**

Some religious groups expressed concern that new PRC religious affairs regulations that entered into force in February had a negative impact on exchanges and interactions with counterparts in the Mainland. Media reported that Hong Kong Christian churches provided underground churches on the Mainland with monetary support, Bibles, blacklisted Christian literature, theological training, and assistance in founding new churches. Under the new regulations in the Mainland, however, many Hong Kong pastors were suspending or canceling their work with Mainland churches to avoid endangering people there, according to media reports.

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 and a local Jewish synagogue maintained regular interaction between religious leaders of each community. Jewish leaders also hosted public events to raise Holocaust awareness.

### **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 government officials, religious leaders, NGOs, and community representatives. The Consul General and other consulate officials met with Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Sikh religious leaders and adherents 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 promoted 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, Confucian, 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 2018 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 and protests of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in Mainland China.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

In meetings with religious leaders and civil society representatives, representatives from the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau stressed the importance of religious freedom and tolerance for all religious groups and discussed religious communities' relations with their coreligionists on the Mainland and in Hong Kong.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 606,000 (July 2018 estimate). The latest SAR yearbook does not provide an estimate for Buddhists but states they are numerous and that individuals often practice a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese folk religions. Other sources say the majority of the population practices Buddhism or Chinese folk religions. The SAR Government Information Bureau estimates 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. Various reports estimate the Muslim population at 5,000 to 10,000. Smaller religious groups include Baha'is, who estimate their membership at above 2,000, and a small group of Falun Gong practitioners, with some estimates at 20 to 50 persons.

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

### Legal Framework

The 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 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 Macau SAR government, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China, safeguards 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 the name of an individual applicant and that person's position in the group, identification card number, 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. In July Falun Gong practitioners held a rally to protest the CCP's persecution of Falun Gong members on the Mainland and a candlelight vigil to commemorate deceased practitioners.

Some religious groups reported they retained their ability to conduct charitable activities on the Mainland by working through official channels and officially recognized churches. There were reports that Mainland students could not attend local seminaries.

The Catholic Diocese of Macau continued to run many educational institutions.

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**

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

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

U.S. Consulate General representatives in Hong Kong, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious diversity and discussed religious communities' relations with their coreligionists on the Mainland. They raised these points in meetings with civil society interlocutors, including the Catholic Bishop of Macau, Catholic nongovernmental organizations, and Protestant clergy.