

# CHINA 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

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

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities” without defining “normal.” CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. National law prohibits organizations or individuals from interfering with the state educational system for minors younger than the age of 18, effectively barring them from participating in most religious activities or receiving religious education. Some provinces have additional laws on minors' participation in religious activities. The government continued to assert control over religion and restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents that it perceived as threatening state or CCP interests, according to religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international media reports. The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” representing these religions 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, subjected to forced indoctrination in CCP ideology, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong publication, police arrested more than 6,600 Falun Gong practitioners during the year. According to the annual report of The Church of the Almighty God (CAG), authorities arrested more than 7,000 of its members and subjected them to physical abuse, including beatings, sleep deprivation, and being forced into stress positions. The CAG reported some individuals died in custody or as a result of police harassment. *Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported instances of individuals being held for extended periods of time in psychiatric hospitals for practicing their religious beliefs, where authorities beat them and forced them to take medication. Authorities detained and arrested religious leaders trying to hold services online. The government continued its 2019-2024 campaign of “Sinicization” to bring all religious doctrine

and practice in line with CCP doctrine, including by requiring clergy of all faiths to attend political indoctrination sessions, monitoring religious services, preapproving sermons, and altering religious texts, including, according to media, stories from the life of Jesus, to emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the State. In September, United Front Work Department (UFWD) vice head and State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) director general Wang Zuo'an announced foreign influence and control had been completely eliminated from Christianity in China. The government offered financial incentives to law enforcement to arrest religious practitioners and to citizens who reported "illegal religious activity." The government continued its campaign against religious groups it characterized as "cults," including the CAG, and maintained a ban on other groups, such as Falun Gong. From January to July, officials across the country shut down religious venues, including some that were affiliated with the authorized patriotic religious associations, in some but not all cases citing COVID restrictions. There were reports the government used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to increase the surveillance and arrest of religious practitioners, including members of state-sanctioned groups, and to curtail private worship among religious groups. Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, Quran, and other religious literature, and penalized publishing and copying businesses that handled religious materials. Authorities censored online posts referencing Jesus or the Bible. There were numerous reports that authorities closed or destroyed Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist houses of worship and destroyed public displays of religious symbols throughout the country. The government removed architectural features that identified churches and mosques as religious sites. It altered textbooks to delete references to religious holidays. Officials routinely made public statements denigrating the Dalai Lama. In October, the Holy See extended for another two years its 2018 provisional agreement with the government concerning the appointment of bishops. Critics stated the agreement did not alleviate government pressure on Catholic clergy to join the state-sponsored Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA).

Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. In Xinjiang and Tibet, authorities continued to suppress Uyghur and Tibetan language and culture, while promoting ethnic Han individuals in political, economic, and cultural life. Anti-Muslim speech in social media remained widespread.

In multiple public speeches, the U.S. Secretary of State criticized the government for curtailing religious freedom. In an October speech on tolerance given while

visiting Indonesia, the Secretary said, “The gravest threat to the future of religious freedom is the Chinese Communist Party’s war against people of all faiths: Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners alike.” The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy and consulate general officials met with a range of government officials to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance, and for the release of individuals imprisoned for religious reasons. The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general officials met with members of registered and unregistered religious groups, family members of religious prisoners, NGOs, and others to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to Chinese citizens through outreach programs and social media.

On June 17, the President signed into law the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 authorizing the imposition of U.S. sanctions, including asset blocking and denial of visas, against Chinese officials responsible for the detention and persecution of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. In July, the U.S. government imposed sanctions on four Chinese leaders and additional PRC entities pursuant to the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. During the year, the U.S. government added 20 PRC entities to the Department of Commerce’s Entity List that were implicated in human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The U.S. imposed visa restrictions on government and CCP officials for their responsibility for, or complicity in, human rights abuses in Xinjiang. When announcing the visa restrictions, the Secretary of State said, “The United States will not stand idly by as the CCP carries out human rights abuses targeting Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other minority groups in Xinjiang, to include forced labor, arbitrary mass detention, and forced population control, and attempts to erase their culture and Muslim faith.” The U.S. also prohibited import of merchandise believed to have been produced in Xinjiang with forced labor. At the direction of the Secretary of State, U.S. government officials explored whether the PRC’s actions in Xinjiang constituted atrocities, namely crimes against humanity and genocide. The process was ongoing at year’s end.\*

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 2, 2020 the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing

---

\*On January 19, 2021, the then Secretary publicly announced his determination that since at least March 2017, the government has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against the Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

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 (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the State Council Information Office (SCIO) report *Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China*, published in September 2019, there are more than 200 million religious adherents in the country. An SCIO April 2018 white paper on religion in the country states there are approximately 5,500 religious groups.

Local and regional figures for the number of religious followers, including those belonging to the five officially recognized religions, are unclear. 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 the numbers of adherents of many religious groups often are underreported. The U.S. government estimates that Buddhists comprise 18.2 percent of the country's total population, Christians 5.1 percent, Muslims 1.8 percent, followers of folk religions 21.9 percent, and atheists or unaffiliated persons 52.2 percent, with Hindus, Jews, and Taoists comprising less than one percent. According to a February 2017 estimate by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious adherents in the country, including 185 to 250 million Chinese Buddhists, 60 to 80 million Protestants, 21 to 23 million Muslims, seven to 20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Catholics, six to eight million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to the Christian advocacy NGO Open Doors USA's *World Watch List 2020* report, there are 97.2 million Christians. According to 2015 data from the World Jewish Congress, the country's Jewish population is 2,500, concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kaifeng.

The SCIO's April 2018 white paper found the number of Protestants to be 38 million. Among these, there are 20 million Protestants 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. The SCIO report states there are six million Catholics, although media and international NGO estimates suggest there are 10-12 million, approximately half of whom practice in churches not affiliated with the CCPA. 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 the 2018 SCIO white paper, there are 10 ethnic minority groups totaling more than 20 million persons for whom Islam is the majority religion. Other sources indicate almost all Muslims are Sunni. The two largest Muslim ethnic minorities are Hui and Uyghur, with Hui Muslims concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and in Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. The SARA, also referred to as the National Religious Affairs Administration, estimates the Muslim Hui population at 10.6 million. Most Uyghur Muslims are concentrated in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and, along with ethnic Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups, number approximately 14.9 million residents, or 60 percent of the total population there.

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 tens of millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates there are seven to 20 million practitioners.

Some ethnic minorities follow traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The central government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as an expression of "cultural heritage" rather than religious practice.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief," but it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" without defining 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. It says state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who believe in or do not believe in any religion.” The constitution states, “Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”

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.

The CCP is responsible for creating religious regulations and oversees the UFWD, which in turn manages SARA’s functions and responsibilities. SARA is responsible for implementing the CCP’s religious regulations and administers the provincial and local bureaus of religious affairs.

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 members.

The law bans certain religious or spiritual groups. 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 also explicitly bans cult organizations.

The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other organizations. The government continues to ban the Guanyin Method religious group (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy) and Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline). The government considers Falun Gong an “illegal organization.” The government also considers several Christian groups to be “cults,” including the Shouters, The Church of the Almighty God (CAG, 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, 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; it uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred or discrimination, or advocate violence.”

The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Regulations require religious organizations to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations are permitted to register, and only these organizations may legally hold worship services. The five associations, which operate under the direction of the CCP’s UFWD, are the Buddhist Association of China (BAC), the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China (IAC), the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church (TSPM), and the CCPA. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official TSPM or Catholics professing loyalty to the Holy See, are not permitted to register as legal entities. The law does not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

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 state-sanctioned religious associations. Registration information is only required once, but religious organizations must reregister if changes are made to the required documentation.

Under revisions to the civil code passed by the National People’s Congress in June, a religious institution established according to law may apply for the status of a “legal person” (nonprofit entity) under Article 92 of the civil code. The revisions formalized the ability of organizations to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations, thereby facilitating authorities’ ability to track and regulate religious institutions. Previously, bank accounts and real estate holdings were commonly held in the name of individual staff members, making it difficult in some cases for authorities to separate the financial matters of members from those of the religious institution.

Religious and other 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, including SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations.

Revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs in 2018 increased restrictions on unregistered religious groups. Individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations stipulate that any form of income from illegal activities or illegal properties shall be confiscated and a fine imposed of between one to three times the value of the illegal income or properties. If the illegal income or properties cannot be identified, a fine of less than 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,600) shall be imposed. Authorities may penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating properties and illegal incomes and levying fines between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100 and \$30,600).

Government policy allows religious groups to engage in charitable work, but regulations specifically prohibit faith-based organizations from proselytizing while conducting charitable activities. Authorities require faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, to register with the government. Once they are registered as official charities, authorities allow them to raise funds publicly and to receive tax benefits. The government does 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 requires faith-based charities to obtain official cosponsorship of their registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often require these groups to affiliate with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations.

Article 70 of the Regulations on Religious Affairs requires members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad for “religious training, conferences, pilgrimages, and other activities.” Anyone found organizing such activities without approval may be fined between RMB 20,000 and 200,000 (\$3,100 and \$30,600). Illegally obtained income connected to the travel may be seized and “if the case constitutes a crime, criminal responsibility shall be investigated according to law.”

The regulations specify that no religious structure, including clergy housing, may be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as investments. SARA regulations place restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments by stipulating the property and income of religious groups, schools, and venues must 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 the venues.



The regulations impose a limit on foreign donations to religious groups, stating such donations must be used for activities that authorities deem appropriate for the group and the site. Regulations ban donations from foreign groups and individuals if the donations come with any attached conditions, and they state that any donations exceeding RMB 100,000 (\$15,300) must be submitted to the local government for review and approval. Religious groups, religious schools, and “religious activity sites” may not accept donations from foreign sources that have conditions attached.

The regulations require that religious activity “must not harm national security” or support “religious extremism.” The regulations do not define “extremism.” Penalties for “harm to national security” may include suspending groups and canceling the credentials of clergy.

National laws allow each provincial administration to issue its own regulations concerning religious affairs, including penalties for violations. Many provinces updated their regulations after the national 2018 regulations came into effect. In addition to the five officially recognized religions, local governments, at their discretion, may permit followers of certain unregistered religions to carry out religious practices. In Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong Provinces, for example, local governments allow members of Orthodox Christian communities to participate in unregistered religious activities.

SARA states, in 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. A provision states, however, that religious organizations should report the establishment of a religious site to the government for approval.

By law, prison inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious faith while in custody. However, the PRC defines the right to religious faith differently than the right to religious activities, such as prayer facilities and access to clergy. Muslim prisoners are reportedly allowed to have meals with the “halal” label.

The law does not define what constitutes proselytizing. The constitution states that no state unit, social organization, or individual may force a citizen to believe or not believe in a religion. Offenders are subject to administrative and criminal penalties.

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 criminalize the act of forcing others to wear "extremist" garments or symbols; doing so is punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, short-term detention or controlled release, and a concurrent fine. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols the law considers "extremist."

Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Online activities ("online religious information services") of religious groups require prior approval from the provincial religious affairs bureau. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles, Qurans, and Buddhist and Taoist texts, 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 first receive approval from the religious affairs department of the local government when the facility is proposed, and again before services are first 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 such groups want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel room or an apartment, they must seek a separate approval from government authorities for that specific service. Worshipping in a space without prior approval, gained either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity and is subject to criminal or administrative penalties.

By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or the construction of "key" projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure must consult with its local bureau of religious affairs (guided 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 to provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs include registration requirements for schools that allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their affiliates to form religious schools. Children younger than the age of 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. Enforcement and implementation of these rules varied widely across and within regions. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. 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 Regulations on Religious Affairs of the XUAR state, “Minors shall not participate in religious activities. No organization or individual may organize, induce or force minors to participate in religious activities.” Minors are also prohibited from entering religious venues. Multiple provinces send letters instructing parents that “teachers and parents should strictly enforce the principle of separation between education and religion and ensure that minors are not allowed to enter religious places, participate in religious activities, or to attend religious trainings.” Implementation of these rules, however, varies greatly across and within regions.

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

On February 1, the Administrative Measures for Religious Groups went into effect. These measures comprise six chapters and 41 articles dealing with the organization, function, offices, supervision, projects, and economic administration of communities and groups at the national and local levels. The measures state that only registered groups may operate legally and stipulate that religious organizations must support the leadership of the CCP, adhere to the direction of Sinicization, and implement the values of socialism. Article 17 states that religious organizations shall “follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, abide by laws, regulations, rules, and policies, correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon, and enhance national awareness, awareness of the rule of law, and citizenship.”

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**

Police continued to arrest and otherwise detain leaders and members of religious groups, often those connected with groups not registered with the state-sanctioned religious associations. There were reports police used violence and beatings during arrest and detention. Authorities reportedly 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.

Sources continued to report deaths in custody, enforced disappearances, and organ harvesting in prison of individuals whom authorities had targeted based on their religious beliefs or affiliation. There were reports that authorities tortured detainees, including by depriving them of food, water, and sleep. NGOs reported that some previously detained individuals were denied freedom of movement even after their release.

The Political Prisoner Database (PPDB) maintained by the human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation counted 3,492 individuals imprisoned for “organizing or using a ‘cult’ to undermine implementation of the law.”

In December, *Bitter Winter* reported that according to a government source, the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission issued a confidential document in September ordering a nationwide, three-year crackdown on the CAG. The campaign outlined three main goals: “To destroy the Church’s system domestically completely, to substantially downsize its membership by preventing church activities and blocking new members from joining, and to curb the development of the church abroad.” *Bitter Winter* reported increased arrests of Church members following the issuance of this document, including 71 arrests in Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province, in September and 160 arrests in Nanyang City, Henan Province, on November 10 alone.

According to the annual report released by the CAG, during the year, at least 42,807 church members were directly persecuted by authorities, compared with 32,815 in 2019. The report stated that authorities harassed at least 35,752 church members (at least 26,683 in 2019), arrested 7,055 (6,132 in 2019), detained 4,045 (4,161 in 2019), tortured or subjected to forced indoctrination 5,587 (3,824 in 2019), sentenced 1,098 (1,355 in 2019), and seized at least RMB 270 million

(\$41.3 million) in church and personal assets. At least 21 church members died as a result of abuse or persecution (19 in 2019). The 21 included four who died as a result of physical abuse or forced labor, three who committed suicide as a result of authorities surveilling and pressuring them to renounce their faith, and four who died of medical complications during or following their detention.

According to the CAG annual report, in August, a woman named Qin Shiqin died in custody in Shandong Province 10 days after her arrest. Facial swelling and blood in the corners of her mouth could be seen on her remains. A 71-year-old woman identified as “Xiang Chen” died in prison in Sichuan Province while serving a three-year sentence because of her faith. Her remains appeared emaciated, her face was swollen and bruised, and a scar was visible under her nose. A man named Zou Jihuang died in custody in Hubei Province of liver cirrhosis. Zou had been arrested in 2017. During his imprisonment, he had developed a liver condition for which he was denied medical treatment, beaten, and forced to perform hard labor. In Shaanxi Province, a 77-year-old woman named Yang Fengying committed suicide after police went to her home multiple times over the course of three years to intimidate and threaten her.

According to the CAG annual report, at least 847 CAG members were arrested between February and April, many of whom were apprehended as a result of the CCP’s antipandemic household checks or at identity card checkpoints. Police extracted information on the church from these individuals through physical abuse, such as administering electric shocks and handcuffing them painfully, with one arm over a shoulder and one twisted up from below.

Media reported authorities used measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19, including facial recognition software and telephone tracking, to identify and arrest members of unregistered or banned religious groups. The government installed surveillance cameras outside unregistered churches during the pandemic. According to media reports, the government conducted door-to-door household inspections, during which they identified and arrested members of banned religious groups. One CAG member said she hid under the bed every time officials came for an inspection. A government employee in Shandong Province said his superiors ordered him to search for nonlocal tenants, particularly members of banned groups, such as the CAG and Falun Gong.

In May, *Bitter Winter* reported the political and legal affairs commission of a locality in northeastern China released a document stating the CCP had established “a stability maintenance mechanism” targeting religious groups, among other

individuals and groups, that the government determined posed “a danger to social stability” during the pandemic.

*Bitter Winter* reported that between February and March, authorities used COVID-19-related mandatory identification checks and home inspections to arrest 325 CAG members. In February, authorities arrested two church members during an identification check, searched their home, and confiscated RMB 45,000 (\$6,900) of church valuables. During interrogation, officers reportedly placed a plastic bag over the head of one of the Church members and beat him. They also strapped him to a “tiger bench” with his body tied in a stress position and shocked him with an electric baton. According to *Bitter Winter*, another church member was arrested when a pandemic inspection team that included community representatives, health personnel, and police officers came to his home. During his interrogation, officers reportedly covered his mouth with a plastic bag and hit him on the face with a desk calendar, stepped on his feet, beat his calves with an iron rod, and forced him to hold a live electric baton.

According to *Minghui*, police arrested 6,659 Falun Gong practitioners and harassed 8,576 practitioners during the year for refusing to renounce their faith, compared with 6,109 arrested and 3,582 harassed in 2019. The arrests occurred throughout the country. Hebei, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Jilin, Sichuan, and Liaoning were the provinces where the highest number of practitioners were targeted. Those arrested included teachers, engineers, lawyers, journalists, authors, and dancers. *Minghui* stated individuals were tortured in custody. *Minghui* also reported that authorities sentenced 622 practitioners to prison throughout the country during the year. The sentences ranged from three months to 14 years, with the average sentence being three years and four months.

*Minghui* reported that during the year, 83 individuals from 20 provinces and centrally controlled municipalities died due to being persecuted for being Falun Gong practitioners. Some individuals died in custody as a result of physical abuse, including being deprived of sleep and food, forced into stress positions, and denied proper medical attention. Others died shortly after being released on medical parole. On May 13, authorities in Yuzhou City, Henan Province, arrested Zhang Zhiwen for distributing Falun Gong materials the previous August. Zheng’s husband attempted to bring her clothes and insulin for her diabetes, but authorities refused to accept the items, saying they would provide her medication. Zheng died in custody on May 17 and authorities sent the body directly to a funeral home without notifying her husband. Falun Gong practitioner Li Ling of Dazhangjia Village, Penglai City, Shandong Province, died on July 13 after reportedly being

severely beaten following her arrest on June 28. Village authorities forced her family to cremate her remains on the same day. According to her family, her face was deformed, and she was covered in bruises. The village's CCP secretary and a group of paramilitary soldiers took Li from her home on June 28 after a fellow villager reported seeing her with dozens of Falun Gong booklets.

According to *Minghui*, on September 22 and 23, authorities in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, arrested 27 Falun Gong practitioners and three family members who were not practitioners, and confiscated books, laptops, printers, money, photographs of Falun Gong's founder Li Hongzhi, and other personal items. Authorities harassed eight other practitioners within days of the arrests. One practitioner returned home to find police ransacking her home. They confiscated books on Falun Gong and arrested the woman along with her husband, who was not a practitioner. Following a group arrest of Falun Gong practitioners in Changchun City, Jilin Province, in July, police beat one practitioner, hit his head against the wall, and dragged him around on the concrete floor. He suffered severe injuries to his knees as a result.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on May 18, authorities assaulted several individuals who were protesting the demolition of a Buddhist temple in Shucheng County, Anhui Province, that authorities declared was "a dilapidated building." Police beat one woman for filming the scene. A witness said, "Three officers pressed her to the ground, hitting her collarbones until she lost consciousness, and the phone was destroyed." Police injured a monk in his 70s for waving his walking stick at authorities and accused him of "assaulting the police."

In March, the U.S.-based NGO Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC) released a report, *Organ Procurement and Extrajudicial Execution in China: A Review of the Evidence*. In the report, VOC stated that Falun Gong practitioners and Uyghur Muslim prisoners of conscience were the most likely source of organs for sale in the country's organ-transplant market. A related series of articles published during the year examining the country's organ transplantation system questioned the plausibility of official government statistics about the sourcing of transplant organs, stating there was an overlap between medical personnel performing organ transplants and individuals involved in the anti-Falun Gong campaign.

On March 1, the China Tribunal, an independent tribunal established by the Australia-based NGO International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China, released its *Full Judgment* on the conditions of organ harvesting in the country.

The report was a fuller account with appendices of the evidence the nongovernmental group had drawn on and methodology it had used to reach conclusions contained in its *Short Form Conclusions and Summary Judgment* report issued in June 2019. In the *Full Judgment* report, the group included accounts by individuals, including medical personnel, who stated they were eyewitnesses to abuses, including from medical personnel, and other evidence that documented what the NGO determined to be a decades-long and ongoing state-run program of forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience, principally Falun Gong practitioners. The *Full Judgment* report also contained eyewitness accounts from Falun Gong and Uyghur individuals of involuntary medical examinations, including x-rays, ultrasounds, blood tests, and DNA tests.

According to the *Epoch Times*, a Falun Gong-affiliated news organization, on August 2, authorities broke into the home of a Falun Gong practitioner, pinned her down, and forcibly took a sample of her blood, telling her it was “required by the state.” One officer shouted, “The law does not apply to you. We’re going to wipe you all out.” The *Epoch Times* stated that dozens of other practitioners across the country reported similar incidents. On July 22, authorities in Gaomi County, Shandong Province, arrested and took blood samples from 46 practitioners. An attorney familiar with the cases said the blood sampling did not appear to be a routine physical checkup but rather was illegally “collecting people’s biological samples.”

According to the CAG annual report, harassment of members included the collection of biological data, such as blood samples and hair.

In April, *Bitter Winter* reported instances in which individuals were held against their will in psychiatric hospitals for extended periods of time for practicing their religion. According to a staff member in a psychiatric hospital in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, it was hospital practice to begin “treatment” of CAG members as soon as they were brought in, without any tests or examination. According to a member of the Church from Tianmen City, Hubei Province, who spent 157 days in a psychiatric hospital, “A doctor told me that because of my faith, I was a mental patient, and there was no need for further tests.” Nurses threatened to tie her up if she refused to take medication. One former patient said two doctors pressed her down on a desk and shocked her on the back, hands, and feet with an electric baton to force her to take medication. During the month she was in the hospital, doctors administered six electroshock treatments, causing her to suffer memory loss and numbness in her limbs. She said doctors threatened that her son’s job would be negatively affected if she continued to practice her faith.



International religious media outlets and human rights groups reported that local authorities in several districts around the country continued to award compensation to police officers for arresting religious practitioners from certain groups or confiscating donation money. Conversely, local officials were allegedly disciplined if they did not meet a certain quota for arrests of religious practitioners each month. For example, a government employee from Sanmenxia City, Henan Province, told *Bitter Winter* the municipal government issued arrest quotas for CAG members to subordinate localities, leading to the arrest of 211 individuals. In Jiangxi Province, the police arrested 116 CAG members and confiscated RMB 378,000 (\$57,800) of church and personal assets. *Minghui* reported police received an unknown amount of bonus pay for each Falun Gong practitioner arrested.

According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), authorities raided the homes of and arrested at least eight members of the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) during an online worship service on April 12, Easter Sunday. A pastor and a deputy deacon were among those arrested. According to the NGO International Christian Concern (ICC), authorities continued to harass members in the weeks following the raid. On April 24, authorities took Church member Ran Yunfei to a police station shortly before he was scheduled to speak in an online service. He returned home later that same day. The NGO ChinaAid reported police summoned Ran again in November in connection with his participation in another online religious seminar.

The ICC reported that on May 23, authorities arrested a pastor from the Nanjing Road Church in Wuhan, Hebei Province, during an online evangelism event in which he was taking part. They interrogated him for approximately five hours before releasing him.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in February, police arrested 13 members of the Born Again Movement, also called the All Sphere or All Range Church, in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province. Five of the members arrested were elderly and suffered from various illnesses. Police released the five after protests from their relatives but forced them to sign statements promising to stop their church activities. Police also came to the home of another church member who hosted church gatherings at her home and threatened to arrest her if she did not stop doing so. They said three generations of her descendants would be unable to take college entrance examinations, enroll in the army, or become public servants if she did not stop. The officers took samples of her blood and prints of her fingers and palms.

According to *AsiaNews.it*, on April 2, authorities took Zhao Huaiguo, founder and pastor of the Bethel Church in Cili County, Hunan Province, from his home and arrested him on a charge of “inciting subversion against state power.” Police returned to his apartment on April 15 to confiscate books, Bibles, and photocopies of books as evidence of “illegal trade” in books. His wife said he was likely arrested because he spoke to foreign news agencies about COVID-19 and had not affiliated his church with the TSPM church. ChinaAid reported the Zhangjiajie Intermediate Court tried Zhao in October for “inciting subversion of state power,” and prosecutors recommended an 18-month sentence.

In May, the ICC reported that authorities transferred Pastor Wang Yi of the ERCC from Chengdu City Detention Center to a prison in an unknown location. In December 2019, Wang had been sentenced to nine years in prison. According to the ICC, since his arrest, authorities had denied Wang’s parents the ability to visit him, either in person or virtually, despite their having the legal right to do so, and Wang’s wife and child were living in an unknown location under surveillance.

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. In September 2017, police had detained Gao, a human rights lawyer who had defended members of Christian groups, Falun Gong practitioners, and other groups. In September, the NGO Jubilee Campaign submitted a written statement to the 45th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council calling for the government to “release unconditionally and with immediate effect all political and religious prisoners of conscience, including lawyer Gao Zhisheng.” Gao’s daughter, Geng Ge, submitted a video statement to the council, stating, “As of today, I don’t know if he’s alive or not.”

In October, ChinaAid reported that since July, police in Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province, had threatened and harassed Pastor Wang Hai of the Trinity Church and his wife and detained other church leaders and members of Wang’s extended family. Wang said authorities had targeted the Church because its members belonged to the ethnic Miao minority and were Christian. He said that due to the ongoing harassment, church attendance had dropped from 100 worshippers to only a handful who attended Sunday services.

*AsiaNews.it* reported that on September 1, authorities from the Religious Affairs Bureau in Fujian Province arrested Rev. Liu Maochun, an underground priest of the Mindong Diocese, and held him incommunicado for 17 days to pressure him to

join the CCPA. At least 20 underground priests in the region faced similar pressure from the religious affairs bureau, according to *AsiaNews.it*.

According to RFA, on April 19 and May 3, several dozen state security police and officials from the local religious affairs bureau raided worship services at Xingguang Church, an unregistered church in Xiamen City, Fujian Province. Church pastor Yang Xibo told RFA the congregation was targeted for refusing to join the state-sanctioned TSPM. According to multiple international press reports and mobile phone videos that Church members posted to Twitter, authorities forcibly entered a private residence in which Church members were holding a worship service, without a warrant or showing any form of identification. Authorities seized several congregants and tried to drag them out, injuring three; they detained at least nine members, releasing them approximately 12 hours later. According to RFA, authorities raided Xingguang Church again on June 11, taking away furniture and other church belongings, but did not arrest anyone. ChinaAid stated authorities broke into church members' homes on July 22, destroying and removing property.

In January, RFA reported that authorities in Jinan City, Shandong Province, arrested Hui Muslim poet Cui Haoxin, known by his pen name An Ran, for Twitter posts in which he criticized the government for the imprisonment, surveillance, and persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang and throughout the country. He was held on suspicion of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble.” According to RFA, this charge was “frequently leveled at peaceful critics of the ruling Chinese Communist Party.”

The Falun Dafa Information Center, a Falun Gong rights advocacy group, reported authorities in Beijing detained at least 40 persons ahead of the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on May 22. Sources said police also harassed practitioners and searched their homes and that police told the individuals they were taking the actions because of the upcoming political meetings. On April 21, police forcibly entered the home of Wang Yuling by prying open her window. They ransacked the house and confiscated books and printed materials related to Falun Gong, as well as a printer and computer. They took Wang and her daughter into custody. On April 27, authorities forcibly entered the home of Yang Yuliang, searched it, and confiscated Falun Gong books and photographs of Falun Gong's founder. They held Yang and his daughter, Yang Dandan, in custody for three days.

There continued to be reports of government officials, companies, and education authorities pressuring members of house churches and other Christians to sign documents renouncing their Christian faith and church membership. Media reported the government threatened to withhold social welfare benefits and to retaliate against family members. The NGO CSW stated authorities instructed schools to report the religious beliefs of students and staff.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on November 1, the government began the seventh national population census, collecting a broad range of personal and household data, including individuals' identification numbers. According to several census takers, although there were no questions about religion on the census questionnaire, they were instructed when visiting people's homes to pay attention to religious materials and symbols and to ascertain if the home was being used as a private religious venue. In one case, when five census takers entered a home in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, they saw a Bible and asked the residents if they were Christian. They determined the home was being used as a house church and ordered the residents to stop hosting gatherings. A census taker in Yantai City, Shandong Province, said local police told him and his colleagues to report any households with images associated with Falun Gong. A census taker in Heze City, Shandong Province, said he was ordered to report to police any person who did not allow him inside the home, because refusal might indicate the person held religious beliefs or hosted unauthorized religious gatherings.

According to the ICC, on October 11, police arrested Elder Li Yingqiang of the ERCC in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, just before the church began an online service. During the arrest, police also threatened Li's two young children. Police also arrested another church member, Jia Xuewei, and interrogated him for several hours about ERCC's recent spiritual retreat and the worship that was about to take place. Both were released later that day. An ERCC member told the ICC that authorities likely detained Li and Jia to prevent the online service from taking place. According to the source, police told Li he would be taken from his home every week and that they would target his children if he posted about his experience online.

According to *Bitter Winter*, during the year, authorities in several provinces investigated the personal backgrounds of civil servants, hospital staff, teachers, students, and the family members of each to determine their religious status. In May, the Education Bureau of Jinan City, Shandong Province, required some primary and secondary schools to determine if any of their teachers, students, or their family members were religious.

There continued to be no uniform procedures for registering religious adherents. The government continued to recognize as “lawful” only those religious activities it sanctioned and controlled through the state-sanctioned religious associations. Only government-accredited religious personnel could conduct such activities, and only in government-approved places of religious activity.

SARA continued to maintain statistics on registered religious groups. According to 2014 SARA statistics (the latest available), more than 5.7 million Catholics worshipped in sites registered by the CCPA. The April 2018 white paper by the State Council Information Office (SCIO) stated there were approximately 144,000 places of worship registered for religious activities in the country, among which 33,500 were Buddhist temples (including 28,000 Han Buddhist temples, 3,800 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and 1,700 Theravada Buddhist temples), 9,000 Taoist temples, 35,000 mosques, 6,000 CCPA churches and places of assembly spread across 98 dioceses, and 60,000 TSPM churches and places of assembly.

The 2018 SCIO white paper stated that by 2017, there were 91 religious schools in the country approved by SARA: 41 Buddhist, 10 Taoist, 10 Islamic, 9 Catholic, and 21 Protestant. Students younger than 18 were barred from receiving religious instruction. This report also stated there were six national-level religious colleges. Although there were two CCPA seminaries in Beijing, civil society sources said they regarded one of these institutions to be primarily used as CCPA propaganda for international visitors. The SCIO report also estimated there were more than 384,000 religious personnel in the country: 222,000 Buddhist, 40,000 Taoist, 57,000 Islamic, 57,000 Protestant, and 8,000 Catholic.

The government continued to close down or hinder the activities of religious groups not affiliated with the state-sanctioned religious associations, including unregistered Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and other groups. At times, authorities said the closures were because the group or its activities were unregistered or, at other times, because the place of worship lacked necessary permits. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations. Authorities allowed some unregistered groups to operate but did not recognize them legally. In some cases, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving congregants from these groups with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader. According to *Union of Catholic Asian (UCA) News*, Article 34 of the new Administrative Measures for Religious Groups regulation,

which governs money and finances, if enforced, “will halt the activities of house churches, dissident Catholic communities, and other unregistered religious bodies.”

International media and NGOs reported the government continued to carry out its 2019-2024 five-year nationwide campaign to “Sinicize religion” by altering doctrines and practices across all faith traditions to conform to and bolster CCP ideology and emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. The CCP’s Administrative Measures for Religious Organizations, promulgated in February, further formalized the administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions.

The five-year plan to promote the Sinicization of Christianity called for “incorporating Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clerical attire, and the architectural style of church buildings,” and it proposed to “retranslate the Bible or rewrite biblical commentaries.” According to *Bitter Winter*, on April 13, the UFWD in Zibo City, Shandong Province, issued an order calling on religious groups and clergy to write essays on their “love for the country and the Communist Party.” A Catholic dean in Zibo said that on April 16, a religious affairs bureau official told him to study Xi Jinping Thought and the 19th National Congress of the CCP for an examination he would have to take later. On February 18, the Shenyang Religious Affairs Bureau in Liaoning Province issued a notice that the city’s religious groups should hold events to advance Xi Jinping’s policies. On April 14, the TSPM in Fujian Province issued a document stating, “Posters promoting the core socialist values shall be posted in prominent positions in all church venues. Clergy members should highlight the core socialist values in their sermons and use important festivals, major events, and other occasions to interpret and publicize the core socialist values, so that they are inserted into believers’ minds, their Sunday worship services, and daily lives.” Local government authorities reportedly threatened to close churches whose clergy refused to help spread government propaganda.

According to *Bitter Winter*, the government regularly pressured clergy to incorporate government messages into sermons. Following President Xi’s call in August to curb food waste in the country, two Chinese Christian Councils of Quanzhou, Fujian Province, demanded all TSPM churches integrate the president’s ideas into their sermons, so that “the policy reaches everyone in society.” In response, some clergy members reportedly integrated the president’s exhortation into the Biblical story about Jesus feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish.

Media reported that throughout the year, crackdowns on some churches with foreign ties intensified significantly throughout the country. Many religious

groups faced comprehensive investigations that included checking their background, organizational setting, membership, online evangelism, and finances. Following investigations, authorities shut down hundreds of churches that were reportedly unregistered or whose registration had not been updated under the new regulations. In late 2019, the Jilin Province Religious Affairs Bureau issued a document calling for investigations of churches related to or funded by overseas religious groups and blocking their activities online, and it began implementing these measures during the year. In Shandong Province, national security officers interrogated a house church pastor in February for evangelical activities abroad.

The government media outlet *Xinhua* reported that in September, UFWD vice head and SARA director general Wang announced that in the previous 70 years, through the development of the TSPM, foreign influence and control had been completely eliminated from Christianity in the country.

On May 29, the Hainan Buddhist Association held a training session for Buddhist professionals and monks across the province. The training included advising monks on how to implement religious Sinicization, Xi Jinping's remarks at the National Religious Work Conference, and the religious affairs regulations.

The BAC-affiliated Buddhist website *AmitufoCN.com* reported that on April 16, approximately 50 religious workers, including monks, pastors, imams, and other clergy from the five officially recognized religions, attended a mandatory training program organized by the Hainan Province UFWD, the Hainan Academy of Social Sciences, and the Hainan Party School. Participants studied the principles of the 19th National Congress of the CCP, Chairman Xi's April 13, 2018, speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Hainan Special Economic Zone, and the Regulations on Religious Affairs. Hainan UFWD deputy director general Liu Geng in his opening remarks told the religious professionals to "make full use of religion to promote social harmony." According to *AmitufoCN.com*, on May 29, the Hainan Buddhist Association organized another training session for clergy, teachers, and religious workers from various temples in the province. Song Xinghe, an official in the Hainan UFWD Religious Affairs Bureau, gave a lecture entitled, "Insistence on the Sinicization of Religion."

According to *Gospel Times*, a Chinese Christian news website, from July 15 to 17, the Guangdong TSPM held a training session for 98 clergy to study new regulations and promote Sinicization in Guangdong Province. An associate professor from Jinling Union Theological Seminary gave a lecture on TSPM and

the Sinicization of Christianity. Government officials also gave a lecture on “anticult” measures.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in some parts of the country, local authorities regularly reviewed sermons of TSPM pastors to ensure they were consistent with CCP ideology and contained praise for government leaders. The publication reported that on July 20, the Dandong City Religious Affairs Bureau in Liaoning Province required TSPM clergy to participate in a sermon competition on the Sinicization of religion. The clergy were told to prepare sermons by “looking for elements in the Bible that are relevant to the core socialist values and traditional Chinese culture,” in conformity with “the progress of the times.” One clergy member told *Bitter Winter* that only competition participants would pass the annual review to receive a clergy certificate.

In August, a conference to study the new civil code and volume three of *Xi Jinping on Governance* was held at the Guangxiao Buddhist Temple, organized by the Guangdong Buddhist Association. Approximately 800 leaders of all religious groups in Guangdong Province attended in-person and virtually.

The state-owned *China News Service* reported that on December 1, SARA director general Wang delivered remarks at the 10th National Congress of the BAC. Wang called on the BAC to “pursue political progress toward the adherence of Sinicization of Buddhism” to ensure Buddhist content was suitable for “contemporary social development.”

From August 10 to 16, the Gansu provincial UFWD held what it described as the first round of training for Gansu Province’s main Islamic clerics and the directors of temple management committees at the Lanzhou Islamic Institute. A UFWD press release stated the training was intended to direct the Sinicization of Islam, promote the statement of CCP principles, *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, and “increase political literacy, all while highlighting policies and regulations, history and culture, and national and provincial conditions through the lens of patriotic education.”

In November, *National Public Radio* (NPR) reported that an Islamic scholar in the northwestern part of the country said of Muslim community leaders, “There are no imams who dare to speak out. You can renounce your state-given imam certification and leave the mosque in order to speak out – but then you can be sure you will be constantly monitored.”



On October 13, the state-owned *China National Daily News* reported the Hubei Provincial Islamic Association released an outline for implementing the “five-year plan for Hubei Province to adhere to the Sinicization of Islam in China (2018-2022).” According to the article, measures to implement the plan included “strengthening political identity,” studying the works of Xi Jinping, studying the Regulations on Religious Affairs, and guiding imams to interpret the scriptures in accordance with “Chinese traditional culture and the core values of socialism.”

*China News Service* reported that on November 28, the 10th National Congress of the Chinese Taoist Association was held in Jurong, Jiangsu Province. In addition to passing a code of conduct for Taoist teachers, the congress elected Li Guangfu as the new Taoist Association chairman. Li stated that Taoism should “adhere to the guidance of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era*” and “adhere to the Sinicization of Taoism.”

Media reported in September that Catholics in the country protested the distorted retelling of a Bible story in a textbook the government-run University of Electronic Science and Technology Press published to teach “professional ethics and law” in secondary vocational schools. In the original biblical story from the Gospel of John, Jesus forgave the sins of a woman who committed adultery and prevented a crowd from stoning her to death. In the textbook, Jesus disperses the crowd, but he says to the woman, “I, too, am a sinner. But if the law could only be executed by men without blemish, the law would be dead,” and he then proceeds to stone her to death himself. According to *UCA News*, Catholic critics said the authors of the textbook “want to prove that the rule of law is supreme in China and such respect for law is essential for a smooth transfer to socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Sources told media that authorities in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in north-central China, home to a majority of Hui Muslims, prevented public calls to prayer and banned sales of the Quran. Authorities also prohibited news broadcasts from showing images of pedestrians wearing skull caps or veils.

During the year, authorities reportedly pressured churches to display banners with messages of political ideology, recite the national anthem before singing Christian hymns, and engage in other acts demonstrating loyalty to the CCP over the church. In a press release on October 1, the anniversary of the founding of the PRC, Pastor Wang Qingwen, senior pastor of Jinghe New City, Shaanxi Province, called on six Christian churches in the city to “unswervingly adhere to the three-self patriotic principle of teaching and strive to promote the theological construction of the Sinicization of Christianity.” In the press release, Wang urged churches to

continue to adhere to the guidance of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, and to “hold high the banner of patriotism.”

In December, the *Jerusalem Post* reported there were approximately 100 practicing Jews among the 1,000 individuals with Jewish ancestry in Kaifeng, Henan Province. Lacking access to the Torah, they used Christian Bibles containing the Old Testament. Members of the community said they worried about government crackdowns on religion and had to celebrate Hanukkah and hold other gatherings in secret. One community member said, “Every time we celebrate, we are scared.”

In December, *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities placed pastors of house churches and dissident Catholic priests under arrest to make sure they would not lead Christmas celebrations in churches or private homes. According to the publication, in Xiamen, Fujian Province, police stopped a group of Christians from singing Christmas songs at a mall, even though they had been invited to perform there. Authorities fined a Christian in Lushan County, Henan Province, RMB 160,000 (\$24,500) for gathering people to pray and sing Christmas songs. The NGO Human Rights Defenders reported there was pressure on schools across the country to teach children that Christmas should not be celebrated and that gifts should not be exchanged. According to the NGO, the government gave permission for “spontaneous” street demonstrations by people carrying banners reading “Christmas, Get out of China.”

The government labeled several religious groups as “cults” (*xie jiao* – literally “heterodox teachings”), including the CAG, the Shouters, the Association of Disciples, and the All Sphere Church. The government also continued to ban certain groups, such as Falun Gong, which it classified as an illegal organization. In July, *Bitter Winter* reported that several provinces had introduced measures that encouraged individuals to report on members of what it called “cults,” which carried a penalty of between three and seven years’ imprisonment. According to the CAG’s annual report, authorities harassed and threatened with imprisonment more than 8,400 Church members across the country who refused to sign statements renouncing their faith. In Shandong Province, those who reported on suspected “cult” members could receive up to a RMB 2,500 (\$380) award, while Hainan Province offered awards up to RMB 100,000 (\$15,300). Guangdong Province, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Nanjing City introduced similar measures. Actions by cults to be reported included using the internet to produce or disseminate religious materials; producing or disseminating religious leaflets, pictures, slogans, newspapers, and other publications; and hanging

religious banners and posters in public places. Sources told *Bitter Winter* the campaign against xie jiao was ubiquitous throughout the country. *Bitter Winter* posted photographs of a park in Yuchen County, Shangqiu City, Henan Province, that contained multiple large red banners with anti-xie jiao messages.

The government reportedly discriminated in employment against members of religious groups it labeled as cults and prevented government employees from participating in religious activities. *Faluninfo.net* reported that in June, a police supervisor in Yuzhou City, Henan Province, fired Falun Gong practitioner Zha Zhuolin from the force for refusing to write a statement denouncing the group. According to Zha, the supervisor, Xu Wang, said, “The first rule for a police officer is to be loyal to the [Chinese Communist] Party.”

Media reported that in Guangzhou, pandemic-control volunteers delivered anti-xie jiao brochures, along with facemasks and hand sanitizer, to residents at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, then broadcast anticult propaganda when an industrial park reopened in April.

According to media, police and local religious affairs bureau officials raided the Dongguan Branch of Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church on the evening of August 21 when more than 10 adherents were holding a Bible study session. Police accused the attendees of “spreading heterodox teachings” and detained three individuals. Two were released shortly, but the minister, Yang Jun, was detained until the next day on a fraud charge.

According to *Bitter Winter*, the government responded to protests against school reform in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region by blaming the unrest on banned religious groups, such as Falun Gong, or groups it labeled cults, such as the CAG. On August 28, the region’s Anticult Association launched “Prevention of Xie Jiao Propaganda Month.” Activities during the month included holding events, distributing brochures, and teaching “all ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia to guard against xie jiao.”

In October, CSW reported that some ethnic minority villages had established “village rules” to allow villagers to isolate and target Christians. According to CSW, in September, village authorities in Huang Fei Village, Yingjiang County, Yunnan Province, issued a notice stating that the traditional faith of the Dai community was Buddhism and that Christianity was an “evil cult.” The notice announced that anyone who violated the rules of the village “by believing in Jesus Christ and other sects” would have to pay a financial penalty to the community.

CSW stated that individuals on social media reported the Li community in Hainan Province had also imposed a financial penalty on persons believing in Christianity.

From January to June or July, the government closed venues throughout the country, including religious venues, and prohibited mass gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Bitter Winter* reported, however, that authorities allowed Taoist temples displaying Mao Zedong images to stay open throughout the lockdown. Sources told *Bitter Winter* that people worshiped at the Arhat Temple in Zhumadian City, Henan Province, throughout the lockdown because it had a Mao Zedong wall painting. The director of the Chinese National Ancestors' Temple in Shanqui City, Henan Province, said authorities allowed his temple to remain open during the pandemic because it had a Mao Zedong statue.

Media reported authorities tried to stop many religious groups congregating or holding services online during the COVID-19 lockdown. On February 23, Shandong Province's two state-run Christian organizations, the TSPM and the Chinese Christian Council, issued a notice prohibiting live streaming of religious services. A former TSPM pastor from Jiangxi Province told *Bitter Winter* that in early February, police shut down a chatroom he was using for a religious gathering. The ICC reported that on August 11, the local religious affairs bureau in Yunnan Province fined Zhang Wenli of the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness RMB 20,000 (\$3,100) for conducting unauthorized online Bible study. A TSPM pastor in Binzhou City, Shandong Province, told *Bitter Winter* in April that the government blocked the link he shared with his congregation on WeChat, a Chinese social media application. A house church director in Qingdao City, Shandong Province, live-streamed a church service on YY, a video-based social network, but the service was suspended less than half an hour into the broadcast. An imam in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, reported that shortly after he discussed Islamic festivals on a social media platform, police blocked his account. A local government official in Liaoning Province was summoned by his superiors in March for attending an online service of a South Korean church. They forced him to uninstall the app that allowed him to join the service.

In June, *AsiaNews.it* reported that although the government had begun allowing churches to reopen, the bureaucratic process and conditions for reopening made doing so difficult. A priest in central China said these conditions included getting permission to reopen from the village, city, and provincial governments and meeting strict sanitation requirements. The priest said, "Religion does not seem to belong to us; it belongs to the [Chinese Communist] Party." The *Catholic News Service* reported authorities in Zhejiang Province issued a notice on May 29 stating

that priests were required to “preach on patriotism” as a condition for resuming in-person services. *Bitter Winter* reported in June that authorities in Zhejiang Province required churches to praise the government’s efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to pray for “national economic and social development,” “attainment of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” and “promotion and realization of human destiny community,” all of which were President Xi Jinping’s political slogans.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in July, before the government had begun to lift lockdown restrictions and reopen religious venues in Nanyang City, Henan Province, the city’s religious affairs bureau ordered several folk religion temples to remove religious books and incense burners. Government authorities inspected the Taoist Jade Emperor Temple three times in August. As a condition for reopening the venue, officials ordered the temple to burn scriptures and expel a nun who lived on the premises. The temple remained closed, however, even after meeting these conditions.

In December, *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities, citing the COVID-19 pandemic, took measures to stop Christians from gathering for Christmas celebrations, although it allowed some musical, cultural, and political events to take place. On Christmas Day, riot police blocked the entrance to the Catholic Cathedral of the Savior in Beijing (also known as the Xishiku Church), saying religious gatherings were cancelled due to the pandemic. A large Christmas tree was used to block the entrance to St. Joseph’s Church in Beijing, and signs were also posted there saying gatherings were cancelled due to COVID-19.

According to *Bitter Winter*, officials placed arbitrary restrictions on Catholic churches affiliated with the CCPA, closed facilities, and merged others without the congregations’ consent. Government officials in Linyi used a point system to determine whether a congregation should be merged, considering such factors as whether the congregation had more than 10 members or the facility was equipped with a blackboard, audio system, desks, and chairs.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on January 10, the local religious affairs bureau and the security bureau ordered Father Liu Jiangdong, a Catholic priest from the Church of the Sacred Heart in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, to leave the Zhengzhou Diocese, which was affiliated with the CCPA. A source told *Bitter Winter* that government authorities had previously accused Liu of financial improprieties, suspended his priesthood certificate, and imprisoned him from October 2018 to December 2019. The source said Liu had in fact been imprisoned

because he opposed removal of the cross from atop his church, formed a Catholic youth group, and allowed minors to attend religious services. A member of his congregation said that since Liu's release, authorities had surveilled him, monitored his telephone calls, and locked him out of his residence. A churchgoer said authorities threatened to fine members of Liu's former congregation up to RMB 200,000 (\$30,600) if they sheltered him or invited him to hold Mass in their homes.

Media and human rights organizations reported that SARA issued a new requirement in October that only the IAC was permitted to organize Muslims' pilgrimage trips. The new regulations stated that those who applied to join the Hajj must be "patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct," have never before participated in the Hajj, and be in sound physical and mental health. They also had to be able to completely pay the costs associated with going on the Hajj and must oppose religious extremism. The new administrative measure was reportedly intended to "preserve religious freedom and the continued Sinicization of religion in the PRC."

According to *Bitter Winter*, the municipal government of a city in Zhejiang Province issued a document in April that required authorities to increase "counterterrorism and stability maintenance measures" during Ramadan. The document instructed police to intensify surveillance of local Hui and other Muslims, especially during Friday prayers, the daily breaking of the fast, and other important Ramadan activities. It also instructed police to surveil ethnic minority visitors from Xinjiang by checking their documents and luggage, determining their whereabouts while in the city, and acquiring other information.

NPR reported in November that in the spring, police detained 14 men in Yiwu City, Central Zhejiang Province, because they had purchased Islamic books. They were subjected to weeks of questioning about their political views and online correspondence with Muslim intellectuals and Chinese Muslims overseas. According to a friend of one of the men detained, "The police had printed out the text records everyone had on WeChat with writers and publishers...Now the police say every time they travel, they have to report to [the police] beforehand when they are leaving and where they are going."

Sources reported churches attended by foreigners continued to receive heavy scrutiny, as authorities forced them to require passport checks and registration for members to prevent Chinese citizens from attending "foreigner" services.

*Bitter Winter* reported that in April, authorities placed surveillance equipment, including facial recognition cameras, in at least 40 religious venues in Zhongwei City, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Authorities also installed surveillance cameras in all Protestant and Catholic churches in Jinxiang County, Jinin City, Shandong Province. A deacon at one TSPM Church in Henan Province, where authorities had installed a surveillance camera in December 2019, said, “[Government officials] always know how many congregation members are in the church and what is said during sermons. We have to speak with caution at any time. If we disobey the government, our church will be shut down.” In March and April, authorities in a city in Zhejiang Province placed surveillance cameras outside the entrances of homes of seven members of the CAG. One church member reported she was told this was done for “theft prevention.”

In October, *Bitter Winter* reported that authorities in Jiangxi Province’s Poyang County, which has a large population of Christians, issued orders to install RMB one million (\$153,000) in facial recognition cameras in all state-approved places of worship. According to the report, authorities installed approximately 200 cameras in more than 50 TSPM churches from July to September, and nearly 50 in 16 Buddhist and Taoist temples. A police officer stated the cameras were installed to monitor church members and sermons.

A Catholic source in the northeast part of the country told *AsiaNews.it* in July that government staff attended Sunday services to monitor activities and ensure children who were 18 or younger did not attend. The Grand Mosque in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, displayed signs prohibiting children who were 18 and younger from participating in religious activity. According to one worshipper at the mosque, authorities said this was to allow young people to focus on their secular education.

*Minghui* reported that police in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, intensely surveilled Falun Gong practitioner Ma Zhenyu, who had been released from Suzhou Prison on September 19 after completing his three-year sentence. While monitoring Ma, authorities intimidated his mother and other practitioners.

The Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) reported in September that authorities in Sanya City, in the island province of Hainan, took measures against the predominantly Muslim Utsul ethnic minority, which comprised approximately 10,000 members. They banned girls from wearing traditional dress, including hijabs and long skirts, in school. An Utsul community worker said the ban prompted fierce protests by students and their families and that it was

temporarily lifted after hundreds of students wore hijabs in public and boycotted classes. Photographs and videos circulated on social media showed girls wearing hijabs and reading from textbooks outside their primary school while surrounded by police officers. According to the SCMP, Utsuls working in government or CCP bodies were told the hijab was “disorderly.” The restrictions followed a 2019 government-issued document, *Working Document Regarding the Strengthening of Overall Governance over Huixin and Huihui Neighborhoods*, which referred to the only two predominantly Utsul neighborhoods on the island. The document called for the demolition of mosques displaying “Arabic” features, the removal of shop signs saying in Chinese characters the words “Islamic” or “Halal,” and increased surveillance over the Utsul population.

According to *Bitter Winter*, from March to May, Islamic symbols and writings in Arabic were painted over or covered on signboards of 70 Hui-run businesses in Chuxiong, the capital of the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. According to some shop owners, officials from various state institutions, among them the public security bureau, urban management, and religious affairs bureaus, ordered them to remove the symbols from their signboards or replace them entirely. Otherwise, their business licenses would be revoked. A baker from the prefecture’s Lufeng County said that from December to May, Islamic symbols were removed from the signboards of 62 halal shops in the county. “The state is out of control, like during the Cultural Revolution...Hui men are not allowed to wear white caps and women, headscarves. Hui Muslims will disappear in two or three generations.” Local officials told shop owners that the order came from the central government and that the signboard-removal campaign was nationwide. According to one local resident in Songming County, Kunming Province, signboards on 176 Hui businesses were “Sinicized” between December 2019 and May. A restaurant owner said, “If we Hui people tried to argue with officials, they would call us rioters and arrest us on any trumped-up charge.”

The SCMP reported in September that new foreign teachers coming to the country had to attend a mandatory 20-hour training course of what the news source characterized as “political indoctrination covering China’s development, laws, professional ethics, and education policies.” According to the newspaper, the Hainan provincial public security bureau offered rewards up to RMB 100,000 (\$15,300) for tips on foreigners who “engaged in religious activities without permission,” including teaching religion and evangelizing. One teacher said authorities installed a surveillance camera in his classroom to monitor his lessons.



The SCMP reported in September that many foreign missionaries were not allowed to return to the country after it partially lifted COVID-19 travel restrictions for foreign national residents. According to the Voice of America (VOA), in November, the Ministry of Justice published draft regulations requiring foreign worshippers wanting to host religious activities to apply for a permit and to demonstrate their groups were “friendly to China” in their country of origin. The regulations would ban Chinese citizens from attending any services organized by foreigners and would require those organizing religious activities to provide the names, nationalities, and visa status of those who would attend as well as a detailed program of the service, including which texts would be read, before authorities would grant permission. According to VOA, authorities said the new regulations were intended to stop foreigners from spreading “religious extremism” or using religion “to undermine China’s national and ethnic unity.” The draft regulation specified it would also apply to individuals from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, Quran, and other religious literature. The government continued to allow some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which were used by both registered and unregistered religious groups. During the year, however, many provinces conducted campaigns cracking down on “illegal religious publications” from unofficial distribution channels. The government-affiliated news outlet *Meipian.com* reported that in January, law enforcement officers inspected publication wholesale and retail locations, farmer’s markets, and “urban-rural junctions within their jurisdictions” looking for “illegal religious publications and illegal training courses of a religious nature.” The ICC reported that on March 24, the Zhongshan No. 1 District People’s Procuratorate in Guangdong Province charged Christians Liang Rurui and Zhu Guoqing with conducting illegal business operations that “seriously disrupted market order.” According to the ICC, authorities in Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province, had arrested them in November and December 2019, respectively, for printing 7,000 children’s Bibles. According to the human rights blog Weiwanwang (Rights Protection Network), on July 2, authorities arrested four Christians from the Life Tree Culture Communications Co., Ltd. – Fu Xuanjuan, Deng Tianyong, Han Li, and Feng Qunhao – on charges of “illegal business operations” for selling electronic audio Bible players, small handheld devices that allow the user to listen to (as opposed to read) Biblical text. According to Weiwanwang, the company had been legally established in 2011 in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on September 14, the education and environmental protection bureaus in Luoyang City, Henan Province, inspected a local printing

house to determine whether it was publishing banned religious materials. The printing house manager said, “They checked my storehouse, scrutinized all records, and even looked at paper sheets on the floor, to see if they have prohibited content. If any such content is found, I’ll be fined, or worse, my business will be closed.” According to *Bitter Winter*, similar bans applied to photocopying businesses. One photocopy employee said, “I was told to report anyone who comes to copy religious materials.” Another said, “If we are not sure if a text is religious, we must keep its copy and report it to authorities.”

The ICC reported in September that the People’s Court of Linhai City in Zhejiang Province sentenced online Christian bookseller Chen Yu to seven years in prison and fined him for “illegal business operations,” allegedly for selling unapproved religious publications. Authorities first detained him in September 2019.

In July, *Bitter Winter* reported government restrictions on printing, copying, and mailing nonapproved Buddhist literature increased throughout the country. A source in Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, said authorities confiscated thousands of Buddhist books and compact discs from at least 20 stores in the region. One store owner said authorities confiscated more than 2,000 Buddhist books and materials from the store. Another shop owner said, “In the past, people would send me books and materials they printed themselves to distribute them for free, but nobody dares to do this now.” In March, police in Zhejiang Province forbade printing houses from fulfilling orders from venues not approved by the government. In June, authorities in Hulunbuir City, Inner Mongolia, banned copy centers from printing Buddhist and Christian materials. One copy shop owner said, “Government officials come every day to inspect computers and copy machines. If they discover that religious materials have been copied, I could be held legally accountable.”

*Bitter Winter* reported that in early September, police arrested a person in Jinan City, Shandong Province, who attempted to mail compact discs of sermons by Shenpo Sodargye, a Tibetan Buddhist master, to the more than 100 individuals in Weihai City, Shandong Province, who had ordered them online. The names of the buyers were forwarded to local Weihai police, who summoned them for questioning.

According to *Bitter Winter*, during a meeting on Buddhism organized on July 31 by the Fuzhou City Religious Affairs Bureau in Jiangxi Province, authorities banned all temples in the city from keeping religious books from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the name of “preventing foreign infiltration.” The director of a Buddhist

temple said, “The government controls all books on Buddhism; nothing that does not comply with the CCP ideology is allowed and is considered illegal. Only religious materials promoting the Party are permitted to be circulated.”

According to *Bitter Winter*, local authorities throughout the country continued to ban the sale and display of religious couplets (banners with poetry) traditionally displayed during Chinese New Year. Local authorities threatened to fine or imprison anyone caught selling them. One merchant in Luhe County, Guangdong Province, said, “We don’t carry religious couplets. Even if we had them, we wouldn’t dare sell them.” On January 19, three officials from Poyang County, Jiangxi Province, entered a TSPM church, took photos, and registered the personal information of those in the church. The officials distributed couplets praising the CCP and demanded they be posted. A government employee in Xinmi City, Henan Province, told *Bitter Winter* that in early March, municipal authorities ordered all town and township governments to conduct door-to-door inspections of households and shops looking for religious couplets. Inspectors were instructed to remove the couplets and cooperate with the public security bureau to ascertain where they had been produced. One shopkeeper said authorities threatened to close his business if he posted Christian couplets again.

Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone apps to distribute Christian materials reported the government increased censorship of these materials. According to VOA, in October, ChinaAid stated that online censors removed the words “Christ” (*jidu*), “Jesus” (*Yesu*), and “Bible” (*shengjing*) from social media posts and replaced them with the initials “JD,” “YS,” and “SJ.” The word Christianity was replaced with “JD religion.” According to some scholars, Christians were replacing the words in texts themselves to avoid online censors who might block the posts.

In May, *Bitter Winter* reported authorities continued to dismantle Islamic architectural features and remove Islamic symbols from mosques throughout the country, and it published photographs from multiple locations showing construction workers taking down domes and minarets as well as before-and-after pictures. In Weizhou City, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, many of the more than 4,000 mosques in the city were remodeled or destroyed between 2018 and February 2020 as part of the government’s “de-Arabization and de-Saudization” campaign. Before-and-after photographs of the Weizhou Grand Mosque and other mosques showed that Chinese-style pagodas had replaced minarets and crescent moon symbols had been removed.

In late March, authorities removed the domes and star-and-crescent symbols from 17 mosques in Pingliang City, Gansu Province. A local imam said that before the removals, authorities forced imams to study “de-Arabization and de-Saudization policies as well as the promotion of religion ‘Sinicization.’” The imam said authorities threatened to revoke the credentials of imams who did not cooperate with removal of the symbols. Many mosques visible from major highways in Qinghai Province in September had replaced traditional Islamic minarets with more Chinese-looking structures or appeared to be in the process of doing so. Mosques with more traditional Han Chinese architecture, such as the Grand Mosque in Xining, Qinghai Province, remained unchanged and were highlighted in public tours by imams and other mosque representatives.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in January, authorities removed domes and star-and-crescent symbols from at least 10 mosques in Pingdingshan City, Henan Province. On March 18, amid the coronavirus lockdown, government-hired workers remodeled the roof of the Gongmazhuang Mosque in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, to make it look “more Chinese.” Authorities had removed domes and star-and-crescent symbols from the mosque in November 2019. In late March, the government ordered the removal of domes and star-and-crescent symbols from a mosque in Xiaoma Village, Henan Province. In mid-November, authorities removed the dome and star-and-crescent symbols from a mosque in Qinghua Town, Henan Province, and hung banners reading, “Resolutely resist religious infiltration and combat religious extremism” at the mosque’s entrance. In Maying Village, Henan Province, after the government ordered the removal of symbols from the local mosque, one resident said, “We have to listen to what Xi Jinping says and what state policies indicate. No one dares to challenge the state.”

In December, *Bitter Winter* published before-and-after photographs of numerous churches in multiple provinces, including churches affiliated with the TSPM, that showed that exterior crosses had been removed and facades altered to eliminate Western-style features that identified them as Christian worship venues. Authorities removed crosses from at least 900 TSPM churches in Anhui Province between January and July. In April, *UCA News* reported the removal of crosses from several Catholic churches, including from Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Anhui Diocese on April 18. A priest said dioceses normally cooperated with authorities on the removal of crosses in the hopes that they would not demolish the entire building. On June 6, all crosses, other religious symbols, and pews were removed from the Wangdangjia village church in Linyi County. The “Catholic Church” signboard above its entrance was covered with wooden boards.

According to *Bitter Winter*, between March 2019 and January 2020, authorities removed crosses from approximately 70 Christian churches, including TSPM churches, in Linyi City, Shandong Province. Authorities said the crosses were “too close to the national highway,” “too tall,” or might seem “unpleasant” to visiting provincial government superiors. They threatened to demolish the buildings if the crosses remained. On January 8, the provincial government ordered a TSPM Church near the high-speed rail line in Lanshan District, Shandong Province, to remove its exterior cross because it was “too eye-catching.” The Chinese characters for “love” and “Christian Church” were also removed. Authorities removed crosses from at least 900 TSPM Churches in Anhui Province between January and July.

According to *Bitter Winter*, officials in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province, pressured the abbot of the Buddhist Yuantong Temple to remove an 11-meter (36-foot)-high statue of Guanyin for being “too tall.” According to sources, authorities threatened to close the temple if the abbot did not comply. On March 9, workers dismantled the statue, and photographs accompanying the *Bitter Winter* article showed it lying in pieces on the ground.

Media reported authorities continued to destroy religious sites, including those affiliated with the TSPM and CCPA. Throughout the year, *Bitter Winter* published numerous before-and-after photographs showing churches, temples, and other religious structures that had been reduced in whole or in part to rubble. *Bitter Winter* reported that on March 10, authorities demolished a TSPM Church in Shangqiu, Henan Province. A source told *Bitter Winter* that on March 10 at 4:00 a.m., more than 200 government personnel and police came to demolish a TSPM Church in Xiazhuang Village, Shangqiu City, Henan Province. According to the source, police kicked in the door and forcibly removed a member of the congregation who was guarding the church, fracturing two of his ribs. The contents of the church were buried under the rubble.

On April 20, the government of Shangrao County in Shangrao City, Jiangxi Prefecture, demolished a TSPM Church, saying the structure was “unlicensed and dilapidated.” Sources said local officials told the congregation higher-level officials had ordered the demolition because “the government doesn’t allow belief in Jesus.” A church member told *Bitter Winter* the structure was in fact sound and was also registered with the local religious affairs bureau. The church member said that, contrary to law, authorities did not compensate the congregation for destroying the building. Accompanying the article were photographs showing the church before demolition and a pile of rubble following the demolition. According

to another church member, following the demolition, congregants began practicing separately at home but had to be cautious. “The government arrests anyone in unauthorized religious gatherings. When they find two or three of us meeting, they can charge us with any crime at will, saying we are against the CCP.”

The ICC reported that on September 12, authorities in the town of Xiezhou in Yanhu District, Yucheng City, Shangxi Province, demolished the tombstones of more than 20 Swedish missionaries who had performed missionary work in the country in the early 1900s. They threatened to arrest anyone who photographed or videotaped the incident. Authorities planted vegetation over the gravesites.

Local sources reported authorities continued to close Christian venues or repurpose them into secular spaces. According to *Bitter Winter*, in April, the government of Qingshui Township in Shangrao City, Jiangxi Province, closed a TSPM Church for being “unlicensed and too eye-catching.” Officials destroyed religious symbols inside the church and posted a closure notice at the entrance. In May, officials converted the church into an activity center for the elderly, placing a ping-pong table, Chinese chess boards, and secular books inside.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on January 1, six local government officials and police officers raided a Catholic nursing home in Fuzhou City, Jiangxi Province. They confiscated 30 religious publications, a cross, and other religious symbols, sculptures, and paintings. A photograph accompanying the article showed that a mural of Jesus that had been displayed behind the altar was replaced with a landscape painting and an outdoor sculpture of Jesus was covered with a shed. Authorities pressured the church’s priest to sign an application to join the CCPA, but he refused. According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities also targeted the Benevolence Home, a nursing home operated by nuns in Saiqi Village, Fujian Province. On January 12, nearly 50 local government officials and police officers raided the nursing home where more than 30 persons lived, some of whom were from impoverished households or disabled. Authorities forced the elderly residents out and cut off the building’s electricity and water supply.

In July, a Catholic source in southeast China told *AsiaNews.it* that the local government denied permits to construct new Catholic churches and halted construction that was already underway. In January, *AsiaNews.it* reported that in at least five parishes in Mindong Diocese, Fujian Province, including Fuan, Saiqi, and Suanfeng, authorities cut off power and water to prevent churches from being used, citing “fire safety” measures.

*Bitter Winter* reported that government and law enforcement personnel destroyed the Great Hall of Strength, a Buddhist temple in Handan City, Hubei Province, on March 6. A local Buddhist said authorities demolished it because it “lacked a religious-activity venue-registration certificate.” The temple director said he was never approached about obtaining such a certificate. The local Buddhist said, “The government just wanted to demolish the temple...People cannot argue with authorities; they will accuse us of breaking the law as they please.”

According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities demolished the Buddhist Phoenix Temple in Qitang Town, Chongqing Municipality, on January 3. In March, authorities ordered eight Buddhist temples in Yongchuan District, Chongqing Municipality, to close and brick up their entrances, rendering the buildings unusable. Authorities demolished the Longhua Temple in Ma’anshan City, Anhui Province, on April 1.

Sources told *Bitter Winter* that on May 18, more than 20 officials and police in Shucheng County, Anhui Province, destroyed a Buddhist temple that authorities had declared “a dilapidated building.” When a protester attempted to film the scene, police officers pressed her to the ground and hit her in the collarbone until she lost consciousness. Police then destroyed her mobile phone.

*Bitter Winter* reported several cases of authorities destroying folk religion sites throughout the country. From April 14 to 19, authorities demolished three buildings in the Yangfu Temple in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province. On April 22, authorities demolished 18 statues in two folk religion temples in Linzhou, Henan Province. From April to June, authorities demolished 85 small folk religion temples in Handan, Hebei Province. On May 1, authorities demolished an ancestral hall in Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province.

*Bitter Winter* reported that on July 2 in Dangtu County, Ma’anshan City, Anhui Prefecture, more than 100 police officers destroyed a village folk temple. One villager said police first cordoned off the area to prevent anyone from approaching. The witness said, “They then smashed the lock to get inside and demolished the temple after dragging out the eight elderly believers protecting it.” The online magazine posted a video on social media that showed a large number of police standing guard while a bulldozer knocked down the structure.

*Bitter Winter* reported in July that authorities had not yet reopened the Cao’an Manichean temple in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, which had been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Police were seen periodically patrolling the temple.

Before its closure, authorities ordered the construction of a flagpole for the national flag and placed government propaganda slogans inside the temple.

Religious education for minors remained banned, but enforcement and implementation of the prohibition varied widely across and within regions.

*AsiaNews.it* reported authorities sent a directive to Xilinhaote Middle School Number 6 in Xilinhaote, Inner Mongolia dated March 25 forbidding students from taking part in religious activities in or outside of school. The directive reportedly prohibited parents from teaching their children about religion and religious organizations from operating in schools. Students and teachers found disobeying the restrictions faced expulsion and dismissal.

In November, *Bitter Winter* reported that a fifth-grade teacher in a Liaoning Province primary school told the online magazine any mention of religious holidays had been purged from English-language textbooks. The teacher said a text originally entitled “Easter Party” had been replaced with “English Party” and descriptive passages such as “You will meet the Easter Bunny” with “You will meet Robin the Robot.”

In January, *AsiaNews.it*, reported the government had closed down several Tibetan Buddhist centers in Sichuan Province because, authorities said, “Illegal activities” were carried out in the centers. The NGO International Campaign for Tibet said the government’s actual purpose was to limit the influence of Khenpo Sodargye, a Buddhist monk who founded these centers. The centers were associated with the Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute, from which authorities had expelled more than 15,000 Buddhist monks and nuns since 2016 and destroyed significant portions of the property.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning continued to be required to obtain the support of the corresponding official state-sanctioned 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.

Religious groups reported state-sanctioned religious associations continued to be subject to CCP interference in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice.



The associations also closely monitored and sometimes blocked the ability of religious leaders to meet freely with foreigners.

National regulations required Muslim clerics to meet the following requirements: “Uphold the leadership of the CCP; love Islam and serve Muslims; possess a degree in or receive formal training in Islamic scriptural education; have graduated from junior high school or above, in addition to attaining competency in Arabic; and be at least 22-years-old.” According to sources, imams had to pass an exam testing their ideological knowledge to renew their license each year.

The government and the Holy See remained without formal diplomatic relations and the Holy See had no official representative to the country. On October 22, the Holy See and the PRC announced they had agreed to extend a provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops for another two years. The two parties signed the original agreement in 2018. The precise terms of the agreement were not made public, but according to *Catholic News Agency (CNA)* and *Vatican News*, it was a “pastoral” effort to help unify members of the underground Catholic Church in China – which had remained in communion with the Holy See – with Catholics belonging to the CCPA. *Vatican News* stated the agreement “does not directly concern diplomatic relations between the Holy See and China, nor the legal status of the Chinese Catholic Church or relations between the clergy and the authorities of the country. The Provisional Agreement concerns exclusively the process of nomination of bishops...” Following the signing of the agreement, seven CCPA-affiliated bishops appointed without papal mandate were brought into full communion with the Holy See; an eighth bishop was posthumously recognized. *AsiaNews.it* reported that on November 23, Reverend Thomas Chen Tianhao became the third new bishop without a prior affiliation with the CCPA to be ordained under the agreement, assuming the position of Bishop of Qingdao in Qingdao City, Shandong Province. *UCA News* reported that on December 22, a fourth bishop, Peter Liu Genzhu, was ordained bishop of Hongdong in Linfen City, Shanxi Province.

Commentators, human rights groups, and some Catholic leaders criticized the agreement as doing little to protect freedom of religion or belief for Catholics in China. On November 17, the *America Jesuit Review* published an article discussing 30 bishops who belonged to the underground Catholic Church and refused to join the CCPA. “The situation of these bishops has become more difficult since the agreement as, contrary to what Rome expected, Chinese authorities have used it to pressure underground bishops and priests to submit to the state’s religious policies.” Retired Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong in his

online blog of October 7 said the agreement was lopsided, with the CCP nominating bishops for the Pope to approve, and that persecution of the underground Catholic Church had increased since 2018.

Catholic clergy and laypersons told media the situation of both registered and unregistered Catholic communities worsened during the year. A number of Catholic churches and bishops appointed by the Pope remained unable or unwilling to register with the CCPA. According to *Bitter Winter*, the Catholic Diocese of Mindong in Fujian Province suffered severe persecution from the CCP after most of its priests refused to join the CCPA. Authorities closed five parishes in January. *Bitter Winter* reported multiple instances of authorities pressuring Catholic leaders to join the CCPA and, in some cases, arresting and physically abusing Catholic leaders who refused. According to *Bitter Winter*, during the first half of the year, the CCPA attempted to force 57 unregistered Catholic priests from the Mindong Diocese to join the organization. As of June, 25 had complied, three had resigned in protest, and one was driven out of the diocese. Local authorities continued to pressure the remaining 28 priests to join.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on April 2, officials detained Father Huang Jintong, a priest from the Mindong Diocese's parish in Saiqi Village in Fuan City, Fujian Province. Police deprived the priest of sleep for four days before he signed a document saying he would join the CCPA. According to *AsiaNews.it*, on September 1, the local religious affairs bureau detained another priest of the Mindong Diocese, Father Liu Maochun, for at least 17 days for refusing to join the CCPA.

Sources told *Reuters News Agency* that in May, two Catholic nuns serving at the Holy See's Study Mission to China in Kowloon (Hong Kong) were arrested by mainland authorities when they traveled to Hebei Province to visit their families. The nuns were detained in Hebei for three weeks before being released into house arrest without being charged. They remained under house arrest as of year's end, and their families' homes were under surveillance. The nuns were reportedly allowed to attend Mass but were not permitted to leave mainland China.

In July, *AsiaNews.it* reported that a priest said authorities often gathered priests in order to "brainwash" them, congregation members were no longer able to host Mass in their homes, and bishops of underground dioceses were increasingly arrested since the 2018 signing of the provisional agreement between the Holy See and China. One lay member said there were more restrictions on the number of individuals allowed to attend religious gatherings, children younger than 18 were

forbidden from entering the church, and government authorities often sat in on church meetings to surveil the church.

CNA reported that on October 4, Vincenzo Guo Xijin, the auxiliary bishop of the Mindong Diocese in Fujian Province, announced he would no longer preside over public masses or receive any tithes and said that all administrative matters associated with the diocese should be referred to Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu. In 2006, the Holy See excommunicated Zhan, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, but in December 2018 allowed him to replace Guo as bishop of the Mindong Diocese while Guo stepped into the subordinate position. Zhan was one of seven individuals appointed without papal mandate whom the Holy See recognized as bishops under the 2018 provisional agreement. The government did not recognize Guo, who was not a member of the CCPA, in his role as auxiliary bishop. In an open letter announcing his withdrawal from public religious duties, Guo stated, "The sacraments celebrated by those who sign [a document joining the CCPA] and those who do not sign are legitimate."

In June, CNA reported that authorities detained underground Catholic bishop Cui Tai in Zhangjiakou Municipality, Hebei Province. According to *AsiaNews.it*, authorities in the past had repeatedly placed Cui under house arrest or sent him to forced-labor camps for engaging in evangelization activities without official government permission and for criticizing the CCPA. As of year's end, it was unclear whether he had been released from detention.

Sources told *Bitter Winter* the government threatened to retaliate against family members if clergy in the Mindong Diocese did not join the CCPA. Authorities forced Father Feng from Xiyin Village, Fuan City, to sign an application to join the CCPA by threatening to dismiss his younger brother and sister-in-law from public employment. After another priest refused to join, authorities confiscated the vehicle his brother used for business and shut down his nephew's travel agency.

The ICC reported in July that a member of the ERCC said authorities threatened to send the children of church members to "reeducation camps" and take adopted children away from their parents. The source said authorities had already taken four adopted children from one church family and returned them to their biological parents or found them other homes.

### **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.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers continued to discriminate against religious believers. Religious minorities continued to report employers terminated their employment due to their current or prior religious activities. *Minghui* reported cases of Falun Gong practitioners losing their jobs due to their beliefs.

*Bitter Winter* reported that in June, a sanitation worker in Henan Province was fired for reading the Bible while on a work break. The director of the Environmental Sanitation Bureau fired her after publicly criticizing her earlier in the day. Thereafter, the Environmental Sanitation Bureau required that new workers show a “certificate of no faith” issued by police in the area of their permanent residence registration and stated that “one who believes in the Lord is not allowed.” A man in Shaanxi Province told *Bitter Winter* that he was required to provide a “certificate of no faith” to each of the multiple hotels he had worked at over the course of his career. A man working in the public security sector in Shandong Province said he lost his job because his father was a member of the CAG.

Discrimination against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs continued. Since 2017 and 2018 when articles in the 2005 Public Security Administration Punishment Law related to “suspicious activity” began to be enforced in earnest, Falun Gong practitioners reported ongoing difficulty finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Sources stated the enforcement of this law continued to move the PRC further away from informal discriminatory practices by individual landlords towards a more formalized enforcement of codified discriminatory legislation.

Sources told *Bitter Winter* that government propaganda portraying Uyghurs as radicals, extremists, and terrorists had created societal hostility towards that group. Anti-Muslim speech in social media remained widespread. *Bitter Winter* reported that in March, police in Xiamen City, Fujian Province, sent notices to many rental and real estate agencies forbidding them to rent apartments or shop spaces to Uyghurs. One property owner said police fined him RMB 500 (\$76) for renting to Uyghurs and demanded he send police identification information and photographs of all Uyghur tenants. One Uyghur man said his family had, after some difficulty, found an apartment to rent, but on the condition that the family report to a local

police station three times a week. The man said, “Three days after we signed the rental contract, police officers installed a surveillance camera at our building entrance.” One man in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, said owners preferred to keep their properties empty rather than to rent to Uyghurs. A Uyghur man said he had to use his friend’s bank card because local banks refused to issue him one. Uyghur grocery store and restaurant owners said constant police visits had a severe negative impact on their businesses. A Han businessman told *Bitter Winter*, “The government tries every means possible to deprive Uyghurs of their rights, prohibiting them from renting, doing business, and staying in hotels. The goal is to drive them away and cut off all their sources of survival, forcing them back to Xinjiang to be locked in ‘transformation-through-education’ camps.”

According to *Bitter Winter*, several college students stated college administrators encouraged students to report on fellow students who appeared to engage in religious activities. One Christian student in Inner Mongolia said she had been reported and that school administrators investigated her, frequently summoned her, and forced her to write self-criticism statements. A university professor who was a member of the TSPM Church was demoted from her teaching position after mentioning the Bible in class and was subsequently investigated by the State Security Bureau.

There were reports that Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and other religious minorities continued to face difficulties in finding accommodation when they traveled.

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

The Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other senior State Department officials and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. On September 30, at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See’s Symposium on Advancing and Defending Religious Freedom Through Diplomacy in Rome, Italy, the Secretary gave a speech on the restrictions of religious freedom in China. The Secretary said the CCP “has battered every religious community in China: Protestant house churches, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong devotees, and more. Nor, of course, have Catholics been spared this wave of repression.” In an October speech on tolerance while visiting Indonesia, the Secretary said, “The gravest threat to the future of religious freedom is the Chinese Communist Party’s war against people of all faiths: Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners alike.”

Embassy and consulate officials regularly sought meetings with a range of government officials managing religious affairs to obtain more information on government policies and to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy and consulate officials, including the Ambassador and Consuls General, urged government officials at the central, provincial, and local levels, including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries, to implement stronger protections for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Ambassador highlighted religious freedom in meetings with senior officials. The Department of State, embassy, and consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience and advocated on behalf of individual cases of persons imprisoned for religious reasons.

The Ambassador, Consuls General in Chengdu (prior to its closure by the Chinese government in retaliation for the closure of PRC Consulate Houston), 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. The Consul General in Chengdu (prior to its closure) met with Tibetan and Muslim leaders in Sichuan Province to emphasize support for freedom of religion or belief. 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. Embassy officials met with visiting members of U.S. religious groups to discuss how these groups were engaging with local communities.

The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to local audiences through postings to the embassy website and to its Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. Over the course of the year, the embassy published more than 120 messages promoting religious freedom, including videos, statements, images, and infographics. More than 250,000 social media users engaged with these social media posts, participating in online discussions with embassy staff and with each other. The embassy also highlighted the Secretary's visit to the Vatican to emphasize U.S. support on religious freedom.

The embassy also shared religious holiday greetings from the President, Secretary of State, and Ambassador. These included well wishes on the occasion of special religious days for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists. Millions of social media users viewed these messages, often sparking further comments, such as "Countries that respect religious freedom will be respected," "Freedom of

religion is a prerequisite for building a civil society,” and “The essence of religion is to lead people to the good. As a democratic power, the United States has guaranteed religious freedom.” For International Religious Freedom Day on October 27, the embassy published the Secretary’s message supporting respect for religious freedom as well as information describing the Chinese government’s continuing control over religion and restrictions on the activities of religious adherents. These posts on Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter social media platforms garnered more than 750,000 views and approximately 10,000 engagements.

In January, the Consulate General in Guangzhou submitted comments to the Guangdong People’s Congress and Guangdong Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission regarding the new draft of Guangdong Religious Affairs Regulations. The government stated the new regulations would “protect citizens’ freedom of religious belief, maintain religious harmony and social harmony, standardize the management of religious affairs, and improve the level of legalization of religious work.” In December, the embassy submitted comments and recommendations on the central government’s draft Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Foreign Religious Activities, which proposed burdensome preapproval procedures for almost all religious activities. The draft rules also limited activities of unregistered religious groups and conflated peaceful religious practice with “terrorism.”

On May 22, the Bureau of Industry and Security of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced it would add China’s Ministry of Public Security Institute of Forensic Science and eight commercial entities to the list of entities subject to specific license requirements for export, reexport, and/or transfer in-country of specific items (the “Entity List”) for being complicit in human rights violations and abuses committed in China’s campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention, forced labor, and high-technology surveillance against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in the XUAR. On July 20, the Bureau of Industry and Security announced it would add an additional 11 commercial entities to the list for the same reasons, bring the total number of entities added to the Entity List during the year to 20. These actions constrict the export of items subject to the Export Administration Regulations to entities that have been implicated in human rights violations and abuses in the country’s campaign targeting Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

On July 1, the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, and Homeland Security issued a business advisory to caution businesses about the economic, legal, and

reputational risks of supply chain links to entities that engage in human rights abuses, including forced labor, in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China.

On July 7, the Secretary of State announced the United States was imposing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018.

On July 9, the Secretary of State imposed visa restrictions on three senior CCP officials for their involvement in gross violations of human rights in Xinjiang: Chen Quanguo, the party secretary of the XUAR; Zhu Hailun, party secretary of the Xinjiang Political and Legal Committee; and Wang Mingshan, the party secretary of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB). They and their immediate family members became ineligible for entry into the United States. In making the announcement, the Secretary said the United States “will not stand idly by as the CCP carries out human rights abuses targeting Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other minority groups in Xinjiang, to include forced labor, arbitrary mass detention, and forced population control, and attempts to erase their culture and Muslim faith.” Also on July 9, the Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on Chen, Zhu, Wang, and Huo Liujun, former party secretary of the XPSB, as well as the XPSB organization, pursuant to Executive Order 13818, which builds on the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. In response, the Chinese government on July 13 imposed sanctions on the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, three members of Congress, and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

On June 17, the President signed into law the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, authorizing the imposition of U.S. sanctions, including asset blocking and denial of visas, against Chinese officials responsible for the detention and persecution of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

On July 31, the Department of the Treasury imposed a second round of sanctions pursuant to the Executive Order on one government entity and two current or former government officials, in connection with serious rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang: the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), Sun Jinlong, a former political commissar of the XPCC, and Peng Jiarui, the deputy party secretary and commander of the XPCC.

On December 10, the Secretary of State imposed visa restrictions on Huang Yuanxiong, chief of the Xiamen Public Security Bureau Wucun police station “for



his involvement in gross violations of human rights in Xiamen, China.” In his statement, the Secretary said, “Huang is associated with particularly severe violations of religious freedom of Falun Gong practitioners, namely his involvement in the detention and interrogation of Falun Gong practitioners for practicing their beliefs.” The action also applied to Mr. Huang’s spouse.

On May 1, June 17, September 14, and December 2, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency prohibited imports of specified merchandise, including hair products, apparel, cotton, and computer parts, produced by eight companies that operated in Xinjiang, based on information that reasonably indicated the use of prison labor and forced labor of Uyghurs and other minority groups in Xinjiang being held in internment camps.

On December 27, the President signed into law the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020. The law states in part that decisions regarding the selection, education, and veneration of Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders are exclusively spiritual matters that should be made by the appropriate religious authorities.

PRC authorities consistently harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals who did attend. Authorities routinely declined to approve or postponed U.S. officials’ requests to visit religious sites and meet with religious leaders.

At the direction of the Secretary of State, U.S. government officials explored whether the PRC’s actions in Xinjiang constituted atrocities, namely crimes against humanity and genocide. The process was ongoing at year’s end.\*

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 2, 2020 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.

---

\*On January 19, 2021, the then Secretary publicly announced his determination that since at least March 2017, the government has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against the Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.