

CHINA 2022 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." 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 are officially permitted to hold worship services, although other groups reported meeting unofficially. Regulations require clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and to "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion." The law bans religious or spiritual groups that the government considers to be "cults" or to promote heterodox teachings. On March 1, laws came into effect banning unauthorized domestically generated online religious content and prohibiting overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in the country without a permit. On June 1, revised measures came into effect imposing greater CCP oversight of the financial management of religious groups and venues and regulating the handling of donations and real estate. CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden to engage in religious practices. National law prohibits organizations or individuals from interfering with the state educational system for minors, effectively barring individuals younger than 18 from participating in most religious activities or receiving religious education.

The government reportedly continued to assert control over religious groups and to restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents it perceived as threatening state or CCP interests, according to religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international media reports. NGOs and media continued to report deaths in custody and that the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, disappeared, detained, sentenced to prison,

subjected to forced indoctrination in CCP ideology, and harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. Due to a lack of transparency regarding law enforcement's persecution of religious followers, estimates of those imprisoned during the year for their religious beliefs ranged from the low thousands to over 10,000. The NGO Human Rights without Frontiers estimated the government imprisoned 2,649 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief as of year's end. The Dui Hua (Dialogue) Foundation's Political Prisoner Database counted 7,502 prisoners of conscience as of December 31, and said the most common charges were "organizing or using a cult to undermine implementation of law," endangering state security, and inciting "splittism," a charge often levied at ethnic minorities for taking part in religious, cultural, or pro-independence activities. According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong-affiliated publication, authorities sentenced hundreds of Falun Gong practitioners from 28 provinces and regions for their faith to terms ranging from six months to 15 years in prison and harassed and arrested thousands of others. The Falun Dafa InfoCenter said authorities increased arrests and harassment in July and August in the run-up to the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (20th Party Congress) in an attempt to ensure "stability" for the congress. According to the annual report of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), during the year, authorities arrested thousands of its members and subjected some of them to forced indoctrination, physical abuse, including beatings, sleep deprivation, and being forced into stress positions, resulting in the death of at least 14 individuals. The NGO ChinaAid reported authorities detained and arrested house church members in Beijing during the Winter Olympics in February. Authorities prohibited religious festivals, closed religious venues, and raided worship services, in some cases citing COVID-19 prevention measures. NGOs reported the government continued to pressure unregistered religious groups to join the state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations or disband, subjecting their leaders to arrests and harassment.

The government continued its multiyear campaign of "Sinicization" to bring all religious doctrine and practice in line with CCP doctrine, which included requiring clergy of all faiths to attend political indoctrination sessions and suggesting content for sermons that emphasized loyalty to the CCP and the state. In his October 16 speech to the 20th Party Congress, President and General Secretary Xi Jinping stated the CCP would "remain committed to the principle that religions in

China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt to socialist society.” The government continued its campaign against religious groups it characterized as “cults,” including the CAG and Falun Gong, and it conducted propaganda campaigns against *xie jiao* (literally “heterodox teachings”) aimed at school-age children. Human rights advocacy groups said the regime increasingly classified as *xie jiao* any group the CCP perceived as hostile to the regime, and courts increasingly applied anti-*xie jiao* punishments to groups that were not on the official list.

The government blocked religious websites and censored religious content from the popular messaging service WeChat. Authorities censored Mandarin- and Cantonese-language online posts referencing Jesus or the Bible, removed articles published by Christianity-related platforms, and removed the accounts or instructed internet service providers and individual users to remove accounts whose names contained the words “gospel” or “Christ.” The government prohibited unauthorized online broadcasts of religious services. One NGO said the new rules concerning online religious content essentially treated Christian religious material on the internet “on a par with pornography, drug dealing, and inciting rebellion.” Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious literature and penalized businesses that copied and published religious materials. There were reports authorities continued to remove “Arabic” architectural features such as minarets from Hui mosques and other Muslim religious sites in Qinghai, Yunnan, Shanghai, and Beijing. NGOs reported that in June, riot police injured 20 Hui civilians protesting the demolition of the Baoshan Mosque in Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province.

On October 22, the Holy See announced that the 2018 provisional agreement between it and the government, which addressed the appointment of bishops, was again renewed for another two-year term until October 2024, although the text remained undisclosed. Nevertheless, the 2021 Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy issued by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) made no provision for the Holy See to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops, and the government continued to harass, detain, disappear, and imprison many clergy who refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), including some ordained by the Holy See. In November, the Holy See published a statement expressing “surprise and regret” that the

government, without prior consultation, installed Monsignor John Peng Weizhao as “auxiliary bishop of Jiangxi,” a diocese that is not recognized by the Holy See.

Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities.

The U.S. President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other senior State Department officials, and U.S. embassy and consulate general representatives issued public statements, including via social media, supporting religious freedom and condemning the PRC’s abuses of the rights of religious minorities in the country, including in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. On November 14, the White House in a statement announced that U.S. President raised concerns directly to President Xi regarding PRC “practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and human rights more broadly.” The Ambassador and other 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 and advocacy directly to Chinese citizens through outreach programs and social media.

In February, the United States declined to send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics due to concerns over what the presidential press secretary described as the government’s “ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses.” On June 21, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act came into force, blocking products, goods, and materials originating in Xinjiang from entering the United States due to the risk that they were produced using forced labor. On March 21, the Secretary of State announced visa restrictions against certain unspecified government officials “for their involvement in repressive acts against members of ethnic and religious minority groups and religious and spiritual practitioners inside and outside of China’s borders, including within the United States.” On December 9, the Department of State announced sanctions and visa restrictions against three current and former officials for serious human rights abuses in Tibet,

including serious violations of religious freedom, and for the arbitrary detention of Falun Gong practitioners in Chongqing.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 30, 2022, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (midyear 2022). According to the 2019 State Council Information Office (SCIO) report *Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China*, there are more than 200 million religious adherents in the country. A 2018 SCIO 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. In 2021, the U.S. government estimated 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 1 percent. According to a 2017 estimate by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious adherents in the country, including seven to 20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Roman Catholics, six to eight million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to Boston University’s 2020 World Religion Database, there are 499 million folk and ethnic religionists (34 percent), 474 million agnostics (33 percent), 228 million Buddhists (16 percent), 106 million Christians (7.4 percent),

100 million atheists (7 percent), 23.7 million Muslims (1.7 percent), and other religions adherents who together constitute less than 1 percent of the population, including 5.9 million Taoists, 1.8 million Confucians, 20,500 Sikhs, and 2,900 Jews. 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 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 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, the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for Catholics. 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. The Lisu ethnic group in Yunnan Province, for example, includes many Christian adherents, officially estimated to number between 300,000 and 700,000.

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. Uyghur Muslims are concentrated in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Prefecture.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by school, the vast majority of Buddhists are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, according to the Pew Research Center. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated there were 70 million adherents. Falun Gong sources estimate that tens of

millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates 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 the 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 a 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 states 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 individuals or groups to take legal action 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 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 United Front Work Department (UFWD) are the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the TSPM, and the CCPA. Other religious groups, such as

Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official TSPM or Catholics professing loyalty to the Holy See but not affiliated with the CCPA, 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.

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

The 2020 Administrative Measures for Religious Groups regulate 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. The measures state 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 SARA's 2021 Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism. The measures state religious clergy "should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability." The measures also state that clergy should "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion." The measures also provide that "entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration." The measures create a database of "religious personnel" to track their performance and also stipulate that authorities will hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of individual religious clergy. They stipulate religious staff should

“focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, [and] studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization. The measures instruct religious clergy to integrate these doctrines and regulations into “preaching and to play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country.”

On March 1, the Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services came into effect. Issued jointly by the SARA, the Cyberspace Administration, and the Ministries of Industry and Information Technology, Public Security, and State Security, the measures ban unauthorized domestic online religious content and prohibit overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in the country. The new measures direct government regulators to ban content that uses “religion to incite subversion of state sovereignty, oppose the leadership of the Communist Party, undermine the socialist system, national and ethnic unity, and social stability, or advocate extremism, terrorism, national separatism, and religious fanaticism.” They ban content internet that uses “religion to obstruct the implementation of the state's judicial, educational, marriage, social management, and other systems.” The new measures require that any individual or organization engaging in “cyberspace religious information-releasing services, reposting services, and dissemination platform services,” such as streaming or publishing sermons, obtain a government permit to do so within six months of the measures taking effect and validate that permit every three years. Without a permit, organizations and individuals “must not proselytize online, carry out religious education or training, publish preaching or repost or link to related content, organize the carrying out of religious activities online, [or] broadcast religious rites such as obeisance to Buddha, burning incense, ordinations, services, mass, or baptisms, through means such as text, images, audio, or video either live or in recordings.” To acquire a permit, an individual or organization must apply to the religious affairs department of the government of the province, autonomous region, or municipality where they are located.

On June 1, revised Measures for the Financial Management of Venues for Religious Activities came into effect. Issued by the SARA and the Ministry of Finance in November and December 2021, the measures stipulate that “religious activity sites” (e.g., churches) must establish and improve their internal financial

management systems, including by implementing the government-approved accounting system, and depositing all income into the official bank accounts of the religious group instead of into personal bank accounts. The measures also regulate handling and recording donations, requiring, for example, that collection boxes be opened and donations counted in the presence of three witnesses. The new measures also require that land and real estate used for religious activities be registered in accordance with the law and a real estate certificate be obtained for their use. The measures require venues to formulate an asset management system for their current assets, fixed assets, intangible assets, cultural relics, and cultural assets.

Authorities require CCP members and members of the armed forces to be atheists and forbid them from engaging in religious practices. 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 [xie jiao] 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. Criminal law prohibits “organizing and using a sect, cult, or superstition to undermine implementation of the law.” Violations carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other banned organizations. The government considers Falun Gong an “illegal organization.” 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 also characterizes a number of Christian groups as “cult organizations,” including the Shouters, 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, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Family of Love, and South China Church.

According to regulations, in order to register, religious organizations must submit information on 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 required only once, but religious organizations must reregister if changes are made to the required documentation.

The civil code permits a religious organization established according to law to apply for the status of a "legal person" (nonprofit entity). This status permits such organizations to own property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations, thereby facilitating authorities' ability to track and regulate religious institutions.

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

Regulations stipulate that individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations also 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, officials may impose a fine of less than 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,200). Authorities may penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating those properties and related income and levying fines of between RMB 20,000 (\$2,900) and RMB 200,000 (\$29,000).

Government policy allows registered 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 from the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often require these groups to affiliate with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations.

The law 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 (\$2,900) and RMB 200,000 (\$29,000). Authorities may seize illegally obtained income connected to such travel and, “if the case constitutes a crime, criminal responsibility shall be investigated according to law.” The regulations permit only the Islamic Association of China to organize Muslim pilgrimage trips and require that those who apply to join the Hajj be “patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct,” have never before participated in the Hajj, and be in sound physical and mental health. Travelers must also be able to pay all costs associated with Hajj travel and oppose religious extremism.

Regulations specify that no religious structure, including clerical housing, may be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as an investment. SARA regulations restrict 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 charities befitting their purposes; any individual or organization that donates funds to build religious venues is prohibited from owning those venues.

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 state that donations exceeding RMB 100,000 (\$14,500) 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.

SARA regulations require that religious activity “must not harm national security” or support “religious extremism.” The regulations do not define “extremism.” Measures to safeguard national unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions. Penalties for “harm to national security” may include suspending groups and canceling the credentials of clergy. The counterterrorism law describes “religious extremism” as the ideological basis of terrorism and states religious extremism uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred or discrimination, or advocate violence.”

National laws allow each provincial administration to issue its own regulations concerning religious affairs, including penalties for violations. In addition to the five officially recognized religions, local governments may, at their discretion, permit followers of certain unregistered religions to carry out religious practices.

By law, prison inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious faith while in custody, but not a right to exercise their faith, such as by accessing prayer facilities or meeting with clergy. According to law, 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.

By law and judicial interpretation, it is a crime to force others to wear “extremist” garments or symbols; doing so is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment, short-term detention, or controlled (supervised) release, as well as a concurrent fine. The law and its interpretation do not define what garments or symbols are considered “extremist.”

Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee. Online activities (“online religious information services”) of religious groups require prior approval from the provincial religious affairs bureau, a requirement that overlaps with the new

Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services. Authorities may confiscate religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles, Qurans, and Buddhist and Taoist texts, and close unauthorized publishing houses.

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 dedicated 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 the 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.

Regulations allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their affiliates to form and register religious schools. Children younger than 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. 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 Administrative

Measures for Religious Schools issued by the SARA in 2021 stipulate that religious schools should ensure the curriculum includes CCP ideological training.

Since 2021, the Administrative Measures for Off-campus Training Materials for Primary and Secondary School Students, published by the Ministry of Education, prohibit private tutors, including those based abroad, from using textbooks “propagating religious teachings, doctrines, canons, xie jiao, or feudal superstitions, etc.” “Off-campus training” in the regulation primarily refers to private tutoring services designed to help students prepare for high school and university entrance exams.

National regulations require Muslim clerics to “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 must pass an examination testing their ideological knowledge to renew their license each year. To apply to become an Islamic cleric, applicants first need to submit an “Application Form for the Qualification of Islamic Clerics.” In addition, they must provide a certificate of education from an Islamic school, an education certificate from junior high school or above, and a physical examination certificate issued by a designated hospital (including items such as “mental history”). Applicants are also required to submit a household registration certificate and national identification card. The applicant must receive a letter of recommendation written by the Administration of Islamic Activity Sites where the applicant’s household registration is located and submit it to the Islamic Association of the province, autonomous region, or municipality after review and approval by the local Islamic Association. Buddhist and Christian clergy did not need to undergo a physical exam.

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

The PRC 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 to which they are entitled unless otherwise provided for by law. In case of restrictions, the restrictions shall not contravene the ICCPR. With

respect to Hong Kong, the central government notified the UN Secretary-General, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Government Practices

Authorities 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. 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. Due to the lack of transparency regarding law enforcement's persecution of religious followers, estimates of those imprisoned during the year for their religious beliefs ranged from the low thousands to over 10,000.

NGOs, religious groups, and media sources continued to report deaths in custody, enforced disappearances (often through "residential surveillance at a designated location" – a form of black-site detention utilized by authorities against individuals accused of endangering state security), and organ harvesting in prison of individuals whom authorities targeted based on their religious beliefs or affiliation. NGOs and media reported authorities used violence during arrests and tortured detainees, including by forcing them to maintain stress positions, beating them, and depriving them of food, water, and sleep, and subjected them to forced indoctrination. NGOs reported that some previously detained individuals were denied freedom of movement even after their release.

The NGO Human Rights without Frontiers estimated that as of year's end, the government imprisoned 2,649 individuals for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, including 2,102 Falun Gong practitioners, 463 CAG members, 24 Muslims, 40 members of other Christian groups, and 20 Buddhists.

In March, the human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation published a report entitled *Persecution of Unorthodox Religious Groups in China*. The report, which examined arrests and sentencing of 42 nontraditional religious groups, concluded, "Adherents of unorthodox religions rarely make their way onto prisoner lists submitted to the Chinese government in bilateral and multilateral human rights dialogues. Their numbers dwarf [the number of] those subject to coercive

measures for exercising their political beliefs.” The most common charge was “organizing or using a cult to undermine implementation of law,” but charges also included endangering state security and inciting “splittism.” The Dui Hua Foundation’s Political Prisoner Database counted 7,502 prisoners of conscience as of December 31, including Falun Gong practitioners, CAG members, members of other Protestant house churches, Muslims, and Buddhists.

Minghui reported that 172 Falun Gong practitioners died during the year as a result of persecution suffered because of their faith, compared with 132 in 2021. *Minghui* stated that during the year authorities sentenced 446 Falun Gong practitioners from 28 provinces and regions for their faith and gave them penalties ranging from six months to 15 years in prison. It also reported authorities arrested 3,488 practitioners and harassed 3,843 others. According to the Falun Dafa InfoCenter, “The targeted practitioners came from all walks of life, including former government employees, professors, company managers, teachers, doctors, engineers and accountants.” *Minghui* stated police often used violence during arrests of Falun Gong practitioners and that individuals died under mysterious circumstances while in custody during the year. In multiple instances, authorities reportedly refused to release the bodies of the deceased to the families, instead cremating them without the families’ consent. For example, on February 1, authorities arrested practitioner Ji Yunzhi in her home. They beat and physically abused her while in custody and she died in a hospital in Chiefeng City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, seven weeks later. When Ji went on a hunger strike to protest this treatment, authorities reportedly force fed her and repeatedly slapped her in the face. Upon her death, authorities transferred her body under armed guard to a crematorium against the family’s wishes. On April 3, police in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, arrested 88-year-old Cui Jinshi while she was studying Falun Gong in her home with six others. A few hours later, police told her son she had been taken to an emergency room, where a doctor pronounced her dead. After seeing her body, the son said Cui’s throat had been cut. On July 18, police in Zhoukou City, Henan Province, arrested Li Guoxun and his wife for distributing Falun Gong materials. Police raided their home and confiscated their books, computer, mobile phones, and other belongings. The next day, police released Li’s wife and told her that Li was seriously ill; they later told Li’s son that his father died from a stroke. The family was unable to confirm this claim because police had Li’s body cremated without releasing it to the family.

Minghui also reported several cases during the year of Falun Gong practitioners dying in custody after being denied medical parole. Authorities arrested Liu Hongxia of Dalian City, Liaoning Province, in 2021 for putting up Falun Gong posters. She went on a hunger strike in February and authorities reportedly tied her to a bed, force-fed her, and injected her with unknown drugs. When her condition became critical in October, her family applied for medical parole on her behalf, but the Ganjingzi District Court and Dalian City Detention Center denied it. Liu died in prison on November 8. On December 2, Teng Yuguo, arrested in 2020, died in prison of late-stage colon cancer after authorities neglected his medical care for months and then denied him medical parole because he refused to renounce his faith in Falun Gong. Upon his death, they refused to release the body to the family, instead ordering it cremated.

The Falun Dafa InfoCenter stated authorities physically abused and tortured Falun Gong practitioners in custody. In July, authorities handcuffed a former university professor, forced wasabi water into her nose, and sexually assaulted her. In August, authorities tied a photography studio owner to a metal chair for three days. On October 9, *Minghui* reported staff at the Heilongjiang Province Women's Prison physically mistreated incarcerated Falun Gong members and recruited other prisoners to take part.

On April 4, the *American Journal of Transplantation* published an article titled "Execution by organ procurement: Breach of the dead donor rule in China." The authors stated that having conducted a forensic review of 2,838 papers drawn from a dataset of 124,770 Chinese-language transplant publications, they found 71 instances nationwide in which brain death during organ procurement "could not have properly been declared. In these cases, the removal of the heart during organ procurement must have been the proximate cause of the donor's death." According to the authors, "The identity of all prisoner donors is also unknown, and controversy has long centered on whether non-condemned political prisoners like Falun Gong practitioners and Uyghur Muslims have been used as an organ source. In the medical literature, China is thought to be the second-largest transplant country in the world as measured by absolute transplant volume, behind the United States." An Australian National University article regarding the research said some donors were prisoners of conscience, which the article defined as "people who are imprisoned for who they are or what they believe in."

Minghui reported authorities continued to collect blood samples and biometrics from Falun Gong practitioners against their will during the year, with some practitioners suspecting that this part of was a continued effort by the government to collect medical information for an organ matching database. In one case, on October 4, police in Jinan City, Shandong Province, arrested Falun Gong practitioner Xu Wenlong and his cousin. According to the cousin, whom they released a few days later, police placed heavy shackles on Xu, drew a sample of his blood, and threatened to kill him. His cousin said police also forcibly took a blood sample from her.

On May 4, the European Parliament adopted a resolution finding that “whereas the organ transplant system in China does not comply with the W[orld] H[ealth] O[rganization]’s requirements for transparency and traceability in organ procurement pathways, and whereas the Chinese government has resisted independent scrutiny of the system,” the European Parliament expressed “serious concerns about the reports of persistent, systematic, inhumane, and state-sanctioned organ harvesting from prisoners in the People’s Republic of China, and, more specifically, from Falun Gong practitioners.” The resolution stated that this practice “may amount to crimes against humanity, as defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.”

Minghui stated that during the year, authorities convicted several elderly practitioners. For example, on September 9, the Zhangqiu District Court sentenced Liu Chunping, age 82, of Jinan City, Shandong Province, to one year in prison and a RMB 5,000 (\$730) fine for “promoting superstition and undermining law enforcement with a cult organization.” Authorities arrested Liu in October 2021 for distributing informational materials concerning Falun Gong. Authorities in Weifang City, Shandong Province, arrested Wang Zhigeng, an 82-year-old retired teacher, at his home on August 15 for putting up Falun Gong posters Falun Gong in 2019. They sentenced him to three years in prison and a RMB 5,000 (\$730) fine.

Minghui stated that in the two months leading up to 20th Party Congress in October, the Party “intensified its harassment of Falun Gong practitioners” in an attempt to ensure “stability” for the congress. *Minghui* stated that police, officials from the CCP’s Political and Legal Affairs Committee, and officials from other government agencies and neighborhood committees surveilled Falun Gong

practitioners' homes and attempted to take their pictures, collect their fingerprints, confirm their telephone numbers, and interrogate them as to their practice. In one instance, police in Jiuzhou Town, Cang County, Hebei Province, told a Falun Gong practitioner, "Higher officials ordered us to do this. They ordered us to take pictures to show that we have been here to visit you." *Minghui* reported similar incidents occurred in other parts of Hebei, as well as Shandong, Liaoning, Shanxi, and Heilongjiang Provinces, between July and October.

According to the *Dui Hua Human Rights Journal*, "Acts of clemency for Chinese religious and political prisoners have become increasingly rare in recent years. This decrease is the result of Xi Jinping's hardline approach to both dissent and unorthodox religions, coupled with a sharp drop in judicial transparency." The journal reported that in June, the Shaoquan Intermediate People's Court in Guangdong Province reduced the sentence of Falun Gong practitioner Yu Rongxin from eight and one-half years in prison to seven years and 10 months. Authorities arrested Yu and his wife, Xie Qing in 2017 for "organizing or using a cult to undermine implementation of the law." Xie received a seven and one-half years sentence at that time.

According to the annual report released by the CAG, during the year, authorities arrested at least 10,895 (11,156 in 2021), tortured or subjected to forced indoctrination 3,257 (6,125 in 2021), sentenced 1,901 (1,452 in 2021), and seized at least RMB 240 million (\$34.8 million) in church and personal assets. Physical abuse in detention caused the deaths of at least 14 church members, compared with at least nine in 2021). Among these, Liu Jianjun of Jiangsu Province reportedly died in custody on November 29, 18 days after authorities arrested him. An autopsy showed he suffered blunt force trauma to the head and chest, with three fractured ribs. Beijing authorities arrested a woman identified as Chunyang on September 22. According to the CAG, they forced her to maintain stress positions for several days because she refused to divulge church information. She ultimately collapsed, vomited blood, fell into a coma, and died in detention on October 2.

The CAG report stated, "On the eve of the CCP's 20th National [Party] Congress, many provinces and cities launched a campaign to suppress and persecute CAG under the guise of maintaining stability," resulting in the arrests of thousands of

CAG members. The group said the largest number of arrests, detentions, and sentences occurred in Anhui, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Guangdong Provinces. Authorities reportedly sentenced individuals to long prison sentences for “using a cult organization to undermine law enforcement” for safeguarding church items, possessing religious material at home, participating in religious activities, and communicating with foreign media regarding church activities.

Bitter Winter, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported that in August, authorities targeted several churches that refused to join the TSPM. On August 14, police raided the Mentougou branch of the Zion Church in Beijing, detained Pastor Yang Jun and nine congregants, and confiscated their computers. On August 19, officials in Xian City, Shaanxi Province, determined the Church of Abundance (Fengsheng), which they accused of fraudulently collecting donations, was “an illegal social organization” and “liquidated” the church. On August 21, police in Changchun City, Jilin Province, detained nine members of the Changchun Sunshine Reformed Church on the charge of “operating an illegal religious organization” and beat some members, who subsequently required hospitalization. According to the Italy-based NGO Center for Studies on New Religions, on September 9, the Changchun City Civil Affairs Bureau declared the Changchun Sunshine Reformed Church an “illegal social organization.”

In October, the NGO International Christian Concern published its *Persecution Incident Report: China*, writing, “With the intensified crackdown against churches – both state-vetted and underground – there is no longer a safe place to be a Christian in China.” NGOs ChinaAid and the Ireland-based Church in Chains reported that on January 25, authorities in Shizuishan City, Ningxia Province, arrested Church of the Rock preacher Geng Zejun and sent him to the Shizuishan Detention Center. Authorities charged him with “organizing and funding illegal gatherings.” According to *Bitter Winter*, at Geng’s trial on July 13, the prosecutor recommended an 11-month prison sentence, but the Huinong District Court sentenced him to 15 months. Geng remained in prison at year’s end. Geng and six other members of his church were first arrested in December 2021 for “severely disturbing the social order,” according to a statement issued by the police. The police stated Geng and the other six individuals had been “involved in illegal gatherings multiple times in the name of Christianity” since September

2021. According to the Human Rights Defense Network, his church refused to join the TSPM.

ChinaAid reported that during the Beijing Winter Olympics in February, authorities detained members of house churches. The NGO said that on February 4, the day of the opening ceremonies, authorities arrested Beijing Divine Love Fellowship elder Xu Yonghai and several church members, holding them first at a hotel and then at a coffee shop near the Desheng police station in Beijing.

In August, according to International Christian Concern, police detained Pastor Lian Changnian, his wife Guo Jiujun, their son Pastor Lian Xuliang, and his wife Zhang Jun, along with their nine-year-old son and others from the Church of Abundance in Xian City, Shaanxi Province, after raiding their homes. Following the arrests, authorities handcuffed the adults and brought them to their church for a staged photograph session, during which authorities announced the detainees' alleged crimes: illegal gathering, illegal use of a venue, and illegal collection of funds. A church member who witnessed the event said Lian Changnian had several injuries on his head and arms. Authorities released Guo and Zhang and other church members after the photoshoot, but Lian Changnian and Lian Xuliang remained in custody with their whereabouts unknown ("under residential surveillance at a designated location") in Shaanxi Province. *Bitter Winter* reported on October 20 that their spouses filed an appeal for their release.

Bitter Winter reported that on September 30, officials in Linfen City, Shanxi Province, arrested Pastor Li Jie and Elder Han Xiaodong of the Covenant House Church. At year's end, they were being held in a detention center in Yaodu District in Linfen City. According to *Bitter Winter*, on August 19, more than 150 armed police raided a family summer camp run by the church and detained 70 members. At that time, police also searched Li and Han's homes and seized their Bibles, other Christian books, and documents. According to church members, following the raid, authorities pressured them to sign statements renouncing their church membership and to testify that Li and Han had obtained donations to the church through fraud.

On January 14, the *Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News)* news agency reported a court in Fenyang City, Shanxi Province, sentenced seven members of the Xuncheng Reformed Church to prison terms of six to eight months for

“illegally crossing the border” and smuggling. According to *UCA News*, in 2020, Zhang Ligong, Wang Runyun, Wang Shiqiang, Zhang Yaowen, An Yankui, Zhang Chenghao, and Song Shoushan traveled to Malaysia with valid passports and visas to attend a religious conference and brought back religious literature. Authorities released Zhang Ligong, Wang Runyun, Wang Shiqiang, Zhang Yaowen, and Song Shoushan in March, according to International Christian Concern. The media outlet *Anglican Ink* reported that on November 3, a court sentenced An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao to one year in prison each, but since they had already served 11 months in preliminary detention, authorities released them before the end of December.

Media reported no change in the status of Catholic Bishop Taddeo Ma Daqin, whom authorities placed under house arrest in Shanghai following his resignation from the CCPA in 2012.

According to ChinaAid, in February, a court in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, secretly tried and sentenced Gao Heng of the Guangzhou Bible Reform Church for “provoking trouble and picking quarrels” after he held up a sign reading “pray for the country” in a Guangzhou metro station in June 2021. The details of his sentence were not announced.

Bitter Winter, *UCA News*, and International Christian Concern stated authorities detained Pastor Wang Shunping and four other Christians in late August in Nujiang, part of the Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. On September 16, authorities formally charged them with “organizing and financing illegal gatherings.” According to *Bitter Winter*, authorities originally detained the five individuals for refusing to join a state-sponsored church, and their arrest was another example of the government crackdown against Christians who were members of the area’s Nu and Lisu minorities.

UCA News reported on January 12 that the Linhai City Court in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province, upheld the seven-year prison term and RMB 20,000 (\$2,900) fine for Chen Yu, head of the Wheat Bookstore in Taizhou. Police arrested Chen in 2020 and charged him with “illegal business operation” for selling Christian books. Chen, also known by his social media pseudonym Zhang Mai, allegedly sold more than 20,000 Bibles and other Christian religious books, including some published

in the United States and Taiwan, to thousands of customers around the country using the Weidian e-commerce app.

On July 25, International Christian Concern said seven leaders of the Golden Lampstand Church, including Pastor Wang Xiaoguang and his wife, preacher Yang Rongli, remained in detention in Shanxi Province after being arrested in 2021 and charged with fraud. Both Wang and Yang spent years in prison previously for their refusal to join the TSPM, according to ChinaAid. According to International Christian Concern, although local authorities used dynamite in 2018 to destroy the Golden Lampstand Church building in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province; members of the church continued to meet elsewhere. Yang's brother said authorities denied Yang treatment for her diabetes and visits from her family.

According to ChinaAid, on March 9, authorities in Dalian, Liaoning Province, arrested Christian activist Zhou Jinxia for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" after she held a sign outside of the Zhongnanhai, the location of CCP central headquarters and the State Council in Beijing, on February 20, calling on Xi Jinping to repent and accept Christianity. ChinaAid stated Zhou had engaged in such activities more than 50 times in recent years, resulting in numerous detentions.

According to ChinaAid, on March 5, authorities in Hengyang City, Hunan Province, arrested Chen Wensheng while he was preaching the gospel in public and forcibly took him away. Chen had been detained previously for the same activity six times in 2021, according to the NGO. ChinaAid said personnel from Hengyang City National Security, UFWD, and other departments also threatened Chen's wife and other relatives, reportedly hoping to dissuade him from preaching.

According to reports by Christian media and the NGO Church in Chains, on February 11, authorities in Ezhou City, Hubei Province, sentenced Pastor Hao Zhiwei of the Egangqiao Church to eight years in prison for "fraud for preaching the Gospel" after her church refused to join the TSPM. Authorities placed her in detention in 2019, shortly before they demolished her church building. Church members said Hao's health declined in prison and she developed pancreatitis. Her lawyer announced that Hao would appeal. Officials also arrested two other women, Hong Ying and Wan Yuanxiang, for collecting offerings for their church, an act the government also deemed to be "fraud."

On June 1, revised “Measures for the Financial Management of Venues for Religious Activities” came into effect. *Asia News* and *UCA News* reported in April that these new rules imposed greater government control over religious activities by regulating donations and offerings and by putting the UFD and the Ministry of Finance in charge of the finance of religious sites. According to *Asia News*, this in effect meant that places of worship and their finances could be used “only” per the CCP’s instructions and not on the basis of a local church community’s or a bishop’s instructions. According to *Asia News*, the new measures essentially treated a religious group as any other NGO, with its finances and operations monitored by the government, and were meant to further promote the Sinicization of religion. The news outlet also stated registration and certification requirements for land and real estate further restricted the underground Catholic Church. *Asia News* said, “Many official Catholic churches allow underground groups (recognized by the Vatican but not by the authorities) to use their premises, including chapels. Now this will be impossible because it is against the law and the new measures.”

The SARA continued to maintain publicly available statistics on some, but not all, registered religious groups. According to the SARA, there were 42,439 Buddhist temples and 8,349 Taoist temples registered in the country as of the end of 2021. The SARA did not publish the number of registered Islamic mosques, Catholic churches, and Protestant churches. According to 2014 SARA statistics (the most recent available), more than 5.7 million Catholics worshipped in sites registered to the CCPA. The SCIO’s 2018 white paper stated that approximately 144,000 places of worship were registered to conduct religious activities in the country, among which were 33,500 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 SCIO white paper 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 Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists and others. At times, authorities said they shuttered a gathering because the group or its activities

were unregistered; at other times, because the place of worship lacked necessary permits. Authorities allowed some unregistered groups to operate but did not recognize them legally. In some cases, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving their congregants with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader. In its annual report, ChinaAid said local governments across the country shut down many congregations that refused to join the TSPM. For example, on April 21, the Dalian Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau in Liaoning Province banned the Anshanghong Church. On May 30, Jiangxi Province's Hukou County Civil Affairs Bureau banned the Hukou County Jiexiang Church. On August 19, Shaanxi Province's Xi'an Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau banned the Xi'an Church of Abundance. On September 26, Fujian Province's Putian Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau banned the Berea Church. An International Christian Concern representative said, "The government's goal is to see all house churches go extinct so they can fully control Christianity in China." The CEO of the NGO Release International said in September, "Our partners tell us that churches in China are facing the toughest persecution since the Cultural Revolution."

International media and NGOs reported the government continued to carry out its 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 2020 Administrative Measures for Religious Groups further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions, while, according to the State Council website, at the National Conference on Religious Affairs held in December 2021, President Xi emphasized the need for religious groups and leaders to "uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, work in line with the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, and uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation." In August, ChinaAid stated, "China has spared no effort in its crackdown on religious freedom, requiring that all relevant religious activities be carried out to serve the authorities, that religious information be disseminated with the permission of the authorities, and that believers be brainwashed under the cover of Sinicization of religion[.]"

On June 13, *UCA News* reported state-sanctioned religious groups, including the Chinese Buddhist Association, Chinese Taoist Association, Islamic Association of China, CCPA, Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), TSPM,

and the China Christian Council, issued a joint statement pledging that they would adhere to CCP guidelines for management of religions, including supervision of religious institutes, finances, and properties. The statement said the seven groups sought to “implement the spirit” of the December 2021 National Conference on Religious Affairs.

On February 2, *UCA News* reported that following the national conference in December 2021, the government promoted a new textbook titled *The Principles of Scientific Atheism* for use in colleges and among party members. The book, authored by academic Li Shen, advanced Xi Jinping’s theory that Chinese culture “has always been nonreligious” and his insistence that Karl Marx’s views on religion should be studied thoroughly by the CCP. The book also defended the nonexistence of God and warned of the “harmful effects of religion,” according to *UCA News*.

In March, *Bitter Winter* reported that in a document, UFWD deputy minister and SARA director Wang Zuo’an “requested” TSPM pastors study the new directives on Sinicization of religion that emerged from Xi’s speech at the December 2021 conference. The document stated that religions that refused to follow the “correct political direction” should be resolutely suppressed and eradicated, and “only religions that are compatible with socialist society and have been Sinicized can contribute to the stability of our society.”

The government continued to execute its 2018-22 five-year plan to promote the Sinicization of Christianity by “incorporating Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clerical attire, and the architectural style of church buildings. According to *Bitter Winter*, a TSPM report to 20th Party Congress in October stated that the “new concept of Sinicization” of Christianity meant “accepting the Marxist view of religion.” In the report, TSPM Committee chairman Pastor Xu Xiaohong said the church should accept its role as outlined by President Xi at the December 2021 conference to persuade believers to support the CCP, not interfere with social life, and not interfere with the education of younger generations. Yu said that because these aims were not yet totally clear to all TSPM pastors, the TSPM would launch a new five-year Sinicization plan in 2023, which would include more standardized sermons to be preached in all churches. Yu said he hoped the plan would lead Chinese Protestant Christianity

to “unite more closely around the Central Committee of the Party with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core.”

ChinaAid reported that on May 23, a TSPM group in Fujian Province held a seminar on “Managing Christianity Successfully in the New Era – the Sinicization of Biblical Interpretation, Exposition, and Application.” Approximately 120 government, academic, and religious figures attended. On June 30, a TSPM group in Fujian Province gave a presentation on “Biblical Sinicization” to 100 faculty and staff members from the Pingtan Comprehensive Experimental Zone parish.

Catholic news service *Crux* stated that at the conclusion of the 10th National Congress of Catholicism in Wuhan City, Hebei Province, on August 20, participants promised to “invigorate the Catholic faithful pastorally in line with the socialist principles of the Chinese Communist Party and agreed unanimously to promote “patriotism, socialism, and the Sinicization of the Catholic Church.” According to the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, Politburo Standing Committee member and chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Wang Yang told new leaders of the CCPA and the BCCCC on August 23 to remain loyal to the CCP, resist infiltration of foreign forces, and to “ensure that the leadership of the Catholic Church is firmly in the hands of those who love the country and religion.” Wang said that under the new leaders, the Catholic community was expected to fully implement the government’s “Sinicization” policy and firmly uphold the party’s leadership. Wang urged the Catholic leaders to use “Chinese culture, Chinese language, and Chinese expression methods” to interpret and study Catholic scriptures.

The Guangdong Islamic Association reported that on February 23-24, it hosted a two-day training for imams at the Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou City to promote the Sinicization of Islam. At the event, provincial imams studied the new measures governing use of the internet by religious groups, a code of conduct for Islamic religious professionals, and Xi Jinping’s speeches.

According to the state media outlet *Xinhua*, on September 20, CPPCC chairman Wang also met with the new leadership of the Islamic Association of China after that group’s 11th National Congress. Wang stressed that Islamic leaders should promote the Sinicization of Islam through strict adherence to CCP ideology, socialism, and patriotism. Wang added that Islamic leaders should continue to

improve “self-education,” “self-management,” and “self-restraint,” to resolve “outstanding problems.”

The Guangdong Buddhist Association reported that on June 9, its president, Master Minsheng, convened local Buddhist leaders at the Guangxiao Temple to study Xi Jinping’s speeches and review videos and documents from the 13th Guangdong Party Congress. Mingsheng delivered a speech titled “Striving Together on a New Journey to Deeply Promote the Practice of Sinicizing Buddhism in Guangdong.” He called on Buddhist leaders to organize educational activities on the theme of “loving the Party, loving the country, and loving socialism.” The Guangdong Academy for Buddhist Nuns publicized an October 1 flag-raising ceremony commemorating the country’s National Day, after which the group read CCP classic texts to “greet the 20th Party Congress,” which took place later that month.

State media reported that on September 23, at the Shanghai Municipal Conference on Religious Work, then-Shanghai CCP secretary Li Qiang stated that the country must “always adhere to the direction of Sinicization of religion...actively guide religion to adapt to socialist society...and better become an important window to show the harmonious situation of religion in our country.” Li also stressed that “to do a good job in religious work in the new era, we must strengthen the party's centralized and unified leadership and build a pattern of governance of religious affairs with party committee leadership, government management, social coordination, and religious self-discipline.”

The CCPA news outlet *Church News* reported that on October 10 in Hubei Province, the Wuhan Religious Circle hosted a speech contest for clergy to “Welcome the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.” During the event, 14 clergy from the five government-sanctioned religious groups gave remarks regarding the “direction of the Sinicization of religions in China” and Catholic leaders explained to contest participants “the values and concepts of catechism that are compatible with the core values of socialism....”

International Christian Concern reported that in the lead-up to the 20th Party Congress in October, police raided several house churches in August and September in furtherance of President Xi’s policy of disbanding house churches or bringing them under the control of the TSPM. Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that

on August 14, approximately 30 officers raided a teahouse in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, where 50 Early Rain Covenant Church members were meeting. The officers accused them of holding an illegal gathering and detained Xing Hongwei, a Christian writer and translator, for allegedly assaulting an officer. According to one church member, the state security police chief for Wuhou District led the raid and said the Chengdu police department was taking a “zero tolerance” approach to the church holding gatherings. Also on August 14, police raided the Beijing Zion Church’s Mentuoguo location in Beijing and detained Pastor Yang Jun for three days. Police raided the House of Light Church in Changchun City, Jilin Province, during Sunday worship services on August 21. Videos circulated by congregants showed police beating them during the raid, and two congregants reportedly required medical attention. Authorities detained Pastor Zhang Yong and two other church leaders. The three were released the next day. On September 9, the Changchun City Civil Affairs Bureau banned the Changchun Sunshine Reformed Church, claiming it is an “illegal civil organization” and an “illegal social organization.”

ChinaAid reported that on December 9, the Early Rain Covenant Church held an online event titled “Testimony Conference on the 4th Anniversary of the December 9th Crackdown” to commemorate the anniversary of the start of the government’s campaign to suppress the church, which began in 2018. Before the event started, Deyang City police summoned Elder Li Yingqiang on suspicion of “disturbing the social order.” Preacher Dai Zhichao continued to host the event after Li left, but police subsequently summoned Dai as well on suspicion of “organizing activities in the name of a banned social organization.” Nevertheless, the online event went forward and more than 1,000 persons participated.

According to *AsiaNews*, the regime arrested or disappeared several Catholic clergy prior to the Easter holidays in what sources said was a new clampdown by the regime on the “unofficial” (underground) Catholic Church recognized by the Vatican but not by Beijing. On April 7 in Zhejiang Province, police seized Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Yongjia (Wenzhou) Diocese and put him on a plane to an unknown location in order to prevent him from leading Holy Week celebrations, particularly the Chrism Mass. Authorities detained Shao multiple times previously for his refusal to join the CCPA, the news outlet stated, most recently from October-November 2021. During these detentions, authorities reportedly subjected him to a “thought transformation” process lasting from 10 to 15 days.

Shao was ordained a bishop in 2011 with Vatican approval but his appointment was not at that time approved by the two state-sanctioned church bodies – the BCCCC and the CCPA – and he was not among the Vatican-approved bishops recognized by the CCPA as a result of the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement.

According to ChinaAid, authorities in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, continued their multiyear persecution of the unregistered Trinity Gospel Harvest Church, raiding a two-week-long retreat on April 16 after members shared photographs and videos on WeChat of Pastor Mao Zhibin baptizing six members for Easter. Police arriving on the scene collected identification information, including biometric data and COVID-19 infection status, and conducted facial recognition scans.

ChinaAid reported that in May, the Ministry of Education circulated a survey form widely on social media that required college and graduate students to pledge to refrain from participating in religious activities “inside or outside schools” or wearing religious clothing or symbols.

RFA reported that in December 2021, the Education Bureau of Rong’an County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, issued a circular forbidding kindergartens and primary and secondary schools from celebrating “foreign festivals,” particularly Christmas, which the circular called the “foreign crossing festival.” The circular urged local residents to report Christmas celebrations to the police.

ChinaAid reported authorities prohibited groups from gathering for worship services in areas under lockdown as part of the country’s strict “zero COVID” policy. On April 3, authorities detained seven members of the Zion Reformed Church in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, for allegedly violating pandemic restrictions. Police tried to force the members to sign a pledge disavowing their membership in the church. During their detention, authorities confiscated their mobile phones, took blood and urine samples, recorded their voices, and electronically scanned their faces. ChinaAid reported authorities cancelled the May 24 celebrations of the Feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians in Sheshan District, Shanghai, during that city’s lockdown, in accordance with the country’s zero-COVID policy.

In May, the government announced that it would again suspend Hajj pilgrimages during the year, as it had done in 2020 and 2021, citing continuing concerns about COVID-19.

The government continued to impose restrictions on Muslim Utsuls in Hainan Province, drawn from a 2019 “Working Document Regarding the Strengthening of Overall Governance over Huixin and Huihui,” which referred to the two predominantly Utsul areas in the province. Such restrictions banned traditional dress (hijabs and long skirts), public signs in Arabic, and “Arab” architectural features on mosques.

The government continued to label several religious groups, including the CAG, Shouters, All-Sphere Church, Guanyin Method, and many others as cults or xie jiao organizations. According to *Bitter Winter*, in August, the government updated its official list, which included more than 20 groups, mainly Christian and Buddhist but also Falun Gong. The human rights publication stated the regime increasingly classified as xie jiao any group the CCP perceived as hostile to the regime, and courts “increasingly interpret the category by including in it even groups that are not part of the official list of the xie jiao.” In May, *Bitter Winter* reported the government instituted an anti-xie jiao campaign to crack down on the folk religion of the Zhuang minority in Ningming County, Chongzuo Prefecture, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on the border with Vietnam.

In April, *Bitter Winter* said the Supreme People’s Procuratorate conducted a show trial of six members of the Association of Disciples. The procuratorate claimed that “a large number” of the group’s believers “have seriously disrupted the social order,” according to *Bitter Winter*. The defendants received sentences ranging from one to four years in prison.

In May, the Falun Dafa InfoCenter published a report examining trends related to anti-Falun Gong activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report described activities of the Ministry of Public Security’s Office of the State Council for Prevention and Handling of Cult Issues, colloquially known as the “610 Office,” to carry out “ongoing security campaigns to monitor, arbitrarily detain, punish, and forcibly ‘transform’ Falun Gong believers throughout China – including via torture and extrajudicial killing[.]”

The Dadi Sunshine Cultural Development Center continued to manage the national Anticult Network website under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Security's Office of the State Council for Prevention and Handling of Cult Issues. Launched in 2017, the website primarily displayed information on groups the government identified as cults or xie jiao and laws and regulations pertaining to such groups. The website provided links to services such as psychological counseling for former cult members and searches for missing relatives thought to be part of cults. It also included articles linking cult membership to ill health, immorality, financial hardship, and crime. Additionally, the government website listed approximately 30 local and institutional anti-cult websites around the country.

The Guangdong Anticult Network website published numerous articles during the year with titles such as "The 'Lord God Cult' destroyed my home," "The Deadly Trap – 'Almighty God'," and "Under the clutches of 'Falun Gong', three generations of doom." It also published cartoons and animated videos with anticult messages aimed at children.

ChinaAid reported the Religious Affairs Bureau of Guangzhou City's Zengcheng District created a hotline in July to receive reports of venues established for religious activities without government approval, in addition to reports of "illegal religious activities" that used religion to endanger national security and public safety, undermine ethnic unity, and divide the country. According to the government-run Anticult Network website, Shenzhen City's Yantian District provided in-person and online anticult training during students' summer break in August.

Guangzhou City in Guangdong Province continued its multi-year practice of distributing anticult educational literature together with personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer at large-scale COVID-19 testing locations to "build a unified line of defense for epidemic prevention and control and prevention of cults," according to a July press release from the city's Haizhu district government.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on September 20, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism published draft revisions of the Measures for the Administration of Border Tourism. In addition to prohibiting travel agencies and tour operators from

arranging for tourists to visit areas closed to foreigners, the proposed revisions prohibited arranging for tourists to engage in activities that endangered national security or promoted terrorism, extremism, “ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination, or cults.” *Bitter Winter* said, “One may assume that this is in fact unlikely, but the regulation offers further evidence of the CCP’s obsessions.”

State media and *Bitter Winter* reported that on August 30, Xi Jinping presented an award to Liu Yanfu, head of the anticult coordination section of the Political and Legal Committee of the Wuhai Municipal CCP Committee in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, for his work setting up “caring homes” (cult deprogramming centers) in the autonomous region. According to the award description, Liu achieved great success with his centers, which became a national model. *Bitter Winter* reported Inner Mongolia had 83 such facilities as of September 16.

According to media and human rights NGOs, authorities maintained a near ubiquitous surveillance system of religious sites through the development and widespread deployment of advanced technology such as artificial intelligence, closed-circuit television (CCTV) and facial recognition software, and social media applications that tracked individuals’ movements. Human rights groups stated authorities increasingly relied on surveillance to monitor and intimidate political dissidents, religious leaders and adherents, Tibetans, and Uyghurs. The technology included facial recognition and “gait recognition” video surveillance, allowing police not only to monitor a situation but also to quickly identify individuals in crowds.

According to International Christian Concern, on May 26, local authorities in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, installed three CCTV cameras outside the front door of the Gangfu house church. Church Pastor Ma Chao said the cameras were installed after local police came to the church on May 20, claiming it was under investigation for holding illegal gatherings. During their visit, police interrogated three church elders and photographed the church’s Bibles and hymn books. Ma said police also came to the church in April to inquire concerning his activities.

On March 1, the Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services took effect, officially banning unauthorized domestic online religious activities, which Christian media reported included broadcasting live and

prerecorded religious services. The new measures also directed government regulators to enforce a ban on overseas organizations or overseas individuals and their organizations established in China (i.e., foreign missionaries or missionary organizations) engaging in any religious information activity on the internet. In practice, government-regulated social media apps and internet service providers proactively censored content or, in some cases, party or security personnel directed them to censor content. According to Christian media reports, the new measures also prohibited individuals or organizations from fundraising online “in the name of religion.” The Christian media outlet *LiCAS News* reported on March 13 that the government began issuing permits for online religious services in compliance with the new measures. The *China Christian Daily* reported the government began fully implementing the new measures on September 1. International Christian Concern told *LiCAS News* the measures cut off many house churches from a “crucial resource in their ability to preach the gospel” and made operation of a house church or nonstate-sanctioned church “much more dangerous.”

The *China Christian Daily* said that once the new internet regulations took effect on March 1, online religious activities fell precipitously in April. For example, a church in Henan Province told its congregation to drop out of group chats and not to send any religious messages on WeChat, the country’s popular social media platform. A local church in Fujian Province shrank its digital ministries. Government-regulated content moderators removed WeChat accounts whose names contained the word “gospel.” WeChat censored articles published by Christian-related platforms as well. Government-regulated internet providers told some Christian websites, such as that of the Early Rain Covenant Church, to delete religious material, including articles containing key words such as “Christ,” “Bible,” and “church.” ChinaAid said WeChat group administrators “must try to dilute the usage of words related to the Christian faith or choose something irrelevant for the survival or maintenance of the existing group chat.” Censors classified messages containing the words “Heavenly Father” and “Praise the Lord all ye People” as sensitive and restricted content. Individuals told ChinaAid that censors also flagged WeChat messages containing the word “amen.” Internet providers also blocked access to other Christian websites and deleted some altogether. A spokesman for the NGO Release International said the new rules essentially treated Christian religious material on the internet “on par with pornography, drug dealing, and inciting rebellion.” According to *China Christian*

Daily, some religious groups managed to avoid such censorship by replacing sensitive religious Mandarin characters (*hanzi*) with their Romanized spelling (pinyin) or with symbols and emojis.

ChinaAid reported that in April, the WeChat messaging service blocked the Early Rain Covenant Church's WeChat book discussion group when it detected the word "Christ" in book titles. The error message read, "The word 'Christ' you are trying to publish violates regulations on Internet Information Services, including but not limited to the following categories: pornography, gambling, and drug abuse, excessive marketing, [and] incitement."

On May 4, *LiCAS News* reported the government shut down the website of the Xinguang Presbyterian Church in Shanghai early in the year. The government declared the church illegal in 2021. The NGO said the action against the Shanghai church was unusual because it was taken by a national authority – the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission in the Ministry of Civil Affairs – instead of by local authorities, as was usually the case for unsanctioned churches.

The WeChat account of the Social Service Department of the government-affiliated China Christian Council, which WeChat had temporarily suspended, was authenticated in June.

ChinaAid reported that on July 11, police and religious affairs bureau officials raided the Shenzhen Trinity Harvest Gospel Church in Guangdong Province during an online service and forced Pastor Mao Zhibin and Elder Chu Yanqing to stop the service they were hosting over Zoom.

ChinaAid reported that on September 1, CathAssist, an app launched in 2013 focused on providing church-related content to believers in China, voluntarily ceased operations after government regulators, in exchange for granting a license, demanded it take a series of actions including suspending sharing, changing its name, modifying content, and significantly reducing functionality.

In Cantonese-speaking parts of the country, Christian groups reportedly exercised self-censorship and experienced bans on Cantonese-language social media content followed the implementation of the new nationwide internet religious content rules. ChinaAid reported that in July, the Guangdong Two-Christian

Council required member churches and seminaries to “self-examine and correct the pictures, videos, sculptures, inscriptions,” and other materials on their premises, and to report “violations” to provincial religious affairs authorities. According to the Hong Kong-based newspaper *Mingpao*, the domestic version of TikTok (Douyin) banned some Cantonese live-streamers due to the system’s inability to interpret and censor Cantonese content. *Christianity Today* and RFA reported long-time Christian Cantonese-language websites such as the U.S.-based, 21-year-old Jonah’s House closed in April. The site had been a resource for Bible texts, Bible study materials, hymns, sheet music, sermons, and articles.

On June 6, *China Christian Daily* reported that after the new nationwide internet religious content rules came into effect, provinces began recruiting and training “internet religious information examiners.” Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region authorities held qualification examinations, which 29 individuals passed. The regional government also held sessions to inform the five state-sanctioned religious groups how to apply for internet religious information permits. In Shandong Province, city governments created interagency committees drawn from public security departments to implement the new regulations and train department leaders. In Wuwei City, Gansu Province, local authorities created websites and social media accounts to familiarize examiners and would-be users with and facilitate implementation of the regulations. International Christian Concern reported that in June, 127 persons passed the Guangdong Province’s examination to become “accredited auditors of the Internet Religious Information Service.”

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious texts. *Bitter Winter* reported that in October, the Sanmenxia City Intermediate Court in Henan Province upheld the 2021 conviction of house church pastor Yang Jianxin for “conducting illegal business operations” and “printing and purchasing illegal publications” for printing Bibles for his congregation. Yang faced five-and-a-half years in prison. According to *Bitter Winter*, the prosecutor in the case said printing illegal Bibles created an atmosphere of “spiritual pollution.”

In January, ChinaAid reported that the Shenzhen Intermediate People’s Court in Guangdong Province upheld the 2020 convictions of three employees of the Shenzhen Life Tree Tech Company – Fu Xuanjuan, Deng Tianyong, and Feng

Qunhao – for illegally selling audio Bible players. The three were originally convicted of “running an illegal business” and given sentences of from three to five years in prison and fines of RMB 30,000 to RMB 20 million (\$4,300 to \$2.9 million). According to ChinaAid, in mid-May, Shaanxi Province’s Xi’an Municipal Intermediate Court sentenced Chang Yuchun and Li Chenhui to seven years’ imprisonment and a fine of RMB 250,000 (\$36,200) for printing Christian books. Authorities arrested the couple in 2021.

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

Local authorities throughout the country continued to ban the sale and display of religious couplets (banners with poetry), decorations traditionally displayed on door frames during Lunar New Year. Local authorities threatened to fine or imprison anyone caught selling them.

Bitter Winter reported on September 23 that the government continued to Sinicize Hui mosques and other Muslim religious sites in Qinghai, Yunnan, Beijing, and Shanghai as part of the five-year “Sinicization program” focusing on Muslims outside of Xinjiang Province. According to RFA, from June 27-28, CPPCC Chairman Wang visited the Dongguan Mosque in Xining City, Qinghai Province, to inspect the “renovation project” there, consisting of removing the building’s Arabic-style architectural features. State-owned CCTV News broadcast video of his visit on June 30.

Media reported that Sinicization “rectification” began in August to remove the Arabic-style domes and minarets from the Doudian Mosque in Beijing, the largest Arab-style mosque in northern China. The project was expected to be completed in May 2023.

Bitter Winter reported authorities removed the Arab-style dome from the Shanghai Hui Muslim Cemetery in Weijiajiao while the city was under COVID-19 lockdown in the first half of the year.

The Christian advocacy NGO CSW reported authorities demolished parts of the Baoshan Mosque in Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province, on June 11. Volunteers who

had been guarding the building around the clock since local officials announced plans to demolish it in 2021 were summoned by the township government, leaving the mosque unprotected as approximately 80 riot police surrounded the facility. Twenty civilians sustained injuries as a crowd protesting the demolition clashed with police. According to CSW, to justify their plans in 2021, local officials circulated a petition for Hui Muslims to sign that gave the appearance the Hui were calling on the government to “remove evidence of ‘Saudi and Arabic influence’” and to convert Baoshan Mosque into a “Chinese-style” mosque. The entire local Hui community, including the imam, rejected the petition. CSW further reported that of the more than 100 mosques in Zhaotong City, an area with an estimated Muslim population of over 21,000, only three retained their domes and minarets as of June. In a video of the Baoshan Mosque incident obtained by CSW, a local party secretary in Zhaotong City said, “This [removal of mosque domes] is an unstoppable general trend. It’s been ordered by the central government. No one can stop it.”

On July 12, RFA reported authorities in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, demolished the meeting house of the Catholic Youtong Underground Faithful Church in late June because the congregation refused to join the CCPA and therefore had disobeyed the “religious administration of the state.”

ChinaAid’s annual report included photographs showing authorities on August 25 demolishing the Beihan Catholic Church in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, using explosives.

According to SARA data, at year’s end, religious groups ran 94 schools in the country, compared with 87 in 2021. These included 43 Buddhist (37 in 2021), 11 Taoist (10 in 2021), 10 Islamic, nine Catholic, and 21 Protestant. Authorities continued to bar students younger than 18 from receiving religious instruction, but enforcement and implementation of the prohibition varied widely across and within regions. According to the SARA, there were six national-level religious colleges.

According to ChinaAid, authorities in multiple southern provinces raided, shut down, and fined unauthorized religious educators. In December 2021 in a fishing village near Fuzhou City, Fujian Province, several dozen armed police officers raided a church-affiliated school, detaining 20 teachers overnight, confiscating

books valued at RMB 200,000 (\$29,000), and demanding the demolition of the group's 600 square-meter (6,458 square-foot) building. Also in December 2021, authorities raided a church school in Shunde District, Foshan City, Guangdong Province. On August 8, authorities in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, issued a public notice outlawing Wenzhou Bowen Bible School and Wenzhou Bible School. ChinaAid said authorities also sometimes arrested parents who sent their children to religious schools. According to the NGO, "Many [religious] schools do not dare to release their names or disclose the news stories about repression out of the concern that authorities would be provoked and harass them more severely." In June, the religious affairs bureau in Dali City, Yunnan Province, fined Ji Chungang RMB 150,000 (\$21,700) for organizing a religious training event in Yanghe village.

According to *Bitter Winter*, in April, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education enacted new rules limiting what topics could be taught in classes off-campus, such as private tutoring settings. The commission listed 12 "prohibited situations," including "promoting religious doctrines, religion, xie jiao, feudal superstitions, and anything similar." Teachers who violated the prohibitions would be subject to dismissal. *Bitter Winter* stated rules and practices adopted by schools in the capital often subsequently became the model used by other cities and provinces.

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 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.

In May, International Christian Concern reported local authorities in Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces rejected passport applications of Christians seeking to travel abroad after discovering the applicants' religious background. In one instance, authorities in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, reportedly rejected the passport applications of multiple Protestant students seeking to travel overseas to study. The NGO reported that local authorities were giving passport applications closer scrutiny after a May announcement by the central government that it would tighten control of "nonessential" foreign travel as a COVID-19 prevention

measure. Christians interviewed by the NGO expressed skepticism that the passport crackdown against them was based solely on public health concerns.

The government and the Holy See remained without formal diplomatic relations, and the Holy See continued to have no official representative to the country. On October 22, the Holy See announced that the provisional agreement between the government and the Holy See, originally signed in 2018 for a two-year term and extended for an additional two years in 2020, was again extended for a two-year term through October 2024. The extension followed meetings between Vatican representatives and government officials in Tianjin Municipality on August 28-September 2. Continuing prior practice, neither party made public the text of the provisional agreement.

Media outlets stated that the SARA's 2021 Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy made no provision for the Vatican to have a role in the selection of Catholic bishops in the country, although the 2018 Sino-Vatican provisional agreement reportedly gave both the government and the Holy See a role. The Holy See press office issued a statement on October 22 that stated, "The Vatican Party is committed to continuing a respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party for a productive implementation of the Accord and further development of bilateral relations, with a view to fostering the mission of the Catholic Church and the good of the Chinese people." *Catholic News Agency* reported that prior to the renewal, Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said the Holy See was willing to move its unofficial mission in Hong Kong to Beijing as an indication of its interest in improving relations but was waiting for a signal from the government.

Media reported that on November 24, the government installed Monsignor John Peng Weizhao as "Auxilliary Bishop of Jiangxi," a diocese not recognized by the Holy See. In a statement issued on November 26, the Holy See expressed "surprise and regret" that the appointment "did not take place in accordance with the spirit of dialogue existing between the Vatican and the Chinese sides and with what was stipulated in the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of Bishops." The Holy See noted reports of "prolonged and intense pressure by the local authorities" prior to the civil recognition of Bishop Peng. Officials reaffirmed the Vatican's "complete willingness" to continue its dialogue with the PRC. On November 28, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said he was unaware of the issue and that the government was "willing to continuously expand the

friendly consensus with the Vatican side and jointly maintain the spirit of our interim agreement.”

Media and NGOs reported that despite the provisional agreement, the government continued to harass, detain, disappear, arrest, and imprison Catholic clergy who did not join the state-sanctioned CCPA. CSW stated in its October-December quarterly report *China Voices*, “The deal [between the PRC and the Holy See] has not shielded underground Chinese Catholics from oppression. Instead, the underground Catholic Church is under greater pressure. Bishops and priests who do not join the state-controlled ‘patriotic church’ are banned by the government from carrying out church duties, and their church buildings risk being forcibly demolished.” Vatican guidelines from 2019 permitted Catholic clergy to register with the CCPA in order to “foster the good of their diocesan community,” with the caveat that clergy should clarify orally or in writing when registering that they would also “remain faithful to the principles of Catholic doctrine” if the language of their registration declaration did “not appear respectful of the Catholic faith.” But many local clergy continued to criticize the provisional agreement and remained unwilling to register.

Media outlets reported that on May 11, Hong Kong national security police arrested Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong and an outspoken critic of the provisional agreement and the government’s treatment of the church, on suspicion of alleged “collusion with foreign forces,” an offense under Hong Kong’s National Security Law. The police subsequently released him on bail and his case remained pending at the end of the year. Other Catholic clergy remained in custody at year’s end. *UCA News* reported that Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu continued to be detained in an unknown location. According to media reports, authorities originally detained Zhang together with an unspecified number of seminarians in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, in 2021 for using an abandoned factory as a seminary to train priests. In June, *Bitter Winter* reported that the whereabouts of Bishop Augustine Cui Tai of Xuanhua Diocese in Hebei Province remained unknown since his arrest in June 2020. Cui had been imprisoned off and on since 2007 for refusing to register with the CCPA.

Catholic News Agency reported on September 19 that Vatican representatives visiting the country to negotiate the renewal of the provisional agreement met with Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen, the Vatican-ordained but not government-

recognized bishop of Tianjin Diocese, who has been under house arrest since 2019 for refusing to join the CCPA. *AsiaNews* reported the diocese had been without an “official” bishop since 2005.

In May, International Christian Concern reported local authorities detained at least 10 “unofficial” priests of the underground Catholic Church in Baoding Diocese, Hebei Province, between January and April and held them incommunicado. The missing clergy included Chen Hechao, Ji Fuhou, Ma Ligang, Yang Guanglin, Shang Mancang, Yang Jianwei, Zhang Chunguang, Zhang Zhenquan, Yin Shuangxi, and Zhang Shouxin. International Christian Concern said clergy disappearances were common in Baoding Diocese, the oldest and largest non-CCPA Catholic community in the country, where authorities reportedly subjected detained clergy to months of political indoctrination sessions.

In August, *Catholic News Service* reported that at the 10th National Congress of Catholicism in Wuhan City, Hebei Province, more than 300 Catholic clergy from across the country “unanimously” accepted the report of the CCPA on its efforts to promote socialism and the Sinicization of the Catholic Church as outlined by President Xi. At the congress, members elected Archbishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing Archdiocese as CCPA chairman, and Bishop Joseph Shen Bein of Haimen Diocese as BCCCC chairman. The bishops issued a joint statement urging Catholic clergy to follow “Xi Jinping’s thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” in the spirit of the December 2021 National Conference on Religious Affairs.

According to *UCA News* and RFA, in June, Father Dong Baolu from Zhengding Diocese said authorities “exploited” the Sino-Vatican provisional agreement to demolish his congregation’s worship space in Yutong village, Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province. Dong said the move was government retaliation for his refusal to register with the CCPA. Dong said he was not surprised authorities destroyed his church, since he was the last priest in the area who had not joined the CCPA. “I am the remaining one among more than 100 priests; certainly, they [the authorities] will not spare me.” He said local Catholics were “disheartened” by the demolition of their church.

In his October report to the 20th Party Congress, President Xi stated the country would “remain committed to the principle that religions in China must be Chinese

in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt to socialist society.”

On August 21, a spokesperson for the PRC embassy in Belgium responded to a journalist’s inquiry regarding forced organ harvesting by saying that such allegations were “seriously misleading and deceiving for the public,” that they were “purely fabricated out of thin air and have no factual basis,” and that they were “preposterous falsehoods spread by the Falun Gong cult and some anti-China forces to smear China, hoodwink the international community, and cover up the nature of the cult.” The spokesperson said, “The selling of human organs and illegal transplant are strictly prohibited by China’s laws,” and that the law stipulated “the donation of human organs shall be made under the principle of free will and free of charge.”

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. Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities.

Discrimination against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs reportedly continued. Falun Gong practitioners continued to report difficulties in finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Sources stated government enforcement of provisions on “suspicious activity” in the Public Security Administration Punishment law continued to move the country further away from informal discriminatory practices by individual landlords towards a more formalized enforcement of codified discriminatory legislation.

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

According to an American-based rabbi who regularly posted Mandarin-language videos on social media regarding Judaism, some Chinese viewers repeated antisemitic tropes in their comments, such as that Jews were only interested in

money and controlled world finance. According to the rabbi, some blamed Jews for the mid-1800s Opium Wars between China and foreign powers.

On February 15, the Jewish online media outlet *Tablet* stated, “Since the most recent conflict in Gaza in May 2021, antisemitic tropes and sentiments have been propagated on Chinese state media, encouraged by top Chinese diplomats, and rehashed by well-known Chinese political commentators.” The article cited some Chinese social media influencers who had produced videos and online commentary portraying Jews as “manipulators, penny-pinchers, loan sharks, and drug dealers...[who] have infiltrated key global positions.” The article said mainstream antisemitic influencers included celebrated academics, state-affiliated scholars, and renowned strategists with “access to elite policy circles.” The article stated China was “a country where speech is heavily regulated, monitored, filtered, and self-censored, and so a new wave of Jew-hatred there must be seen as not only tolerated but openly promoted.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, other senior State Department officials, and embassy and consulate general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom in the country, including in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

On November 14, the White House issued a statement concerning the President’s meeting with Xi Jinping during the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, that stated that during the meeting, the President raised concerns over PRC “practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and human rights more broadly.”

In a joint statement issued on May 31, the U.S. President and New Zealand’s Prime Minister expressed grave concerns regarding the human rights violations in Xinjiang, and the erosion of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, which undermines the high degree of autonomy enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.”

In a joint statement issued on December 7 following the annual Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations, the U.S. Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and their Australian counterparts “expressed serious concerns about

severe human rights violations in Xinjiang, the human rights situation in Tibet, and the systematic erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, democratic institutions, and processes undermining the commitments made by the PRC before the handover."

In a speech on May 26 in Washington, D.C., outlining the administration's approach to China, the Secretary of State said, "The United States stands with countries and people around the world against the genocide and crimes against humanity happening in the Xinjiang region, where more than a million persons have been placed in detention camps because of their ethnic and religious identity. We stand together on Tibet, where the authorities continue to wage a brutal campaign against Tibetans and their culture, language, and religious traditions, and in Hong Kong, where the Chinese Communist Party has imposed harsh anti-democratic measures under the guise of national security... Its treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, along with many other actions, go against the core tenets of the UN Charter that Beijing constantly cites and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all countries are meant to adhere to. Beijing's quashing of freedom in Hong Kong violates its handover commitments, enshrined in a treaty deposited at the United Nations."

On December 22, the Secretary of State said at a press conference that the United States and its allies "continue to raise concerns and take joint action around the PRC's human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet, [and] the erosion of freedom of speech and the press in Hong Kong."

On Human Rights Day on December 10, the Ambassador issued a public statement that said, "The United States remains deeply concerned over the People's Republic of China's failure to live up to its international commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We call on the PRC to stop its ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, its repressive policies in Tibet, its dismantling of the autonomy it promised for Hong Kong, its arbitrary detention of those who speak out peacefully, and its global campaign of transnational repression. We continue to support the right of peaceful protest, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the rule of law."

On June 14, the United States joined a group of 47 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern regarding the human rights situation

in Xinjiang as well as deep concern over the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet.

Embassy and consulate general 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. Some government officials, such as the Guangzhou Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission in Guangdong Province, declined multiple requests to meet. Embassy and consulate general 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. 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.

PRC authorities consistently harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities continued to prevent 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.

Embassy and consulate general representatives, including the Ambassador, Consuls General in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Wuhan, and other officials, met with religious groups, as well as academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. Embassy and consulate general officials met with religious leaders to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society and to learn about issues facing religious 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 nearly 72 messages promoting religious freedom, including videos, statements, images, and infographics. The embassy highlighted the

Secretary's participation in the civil society-led International Religious Freedom Summit in June. It posted or retweeted posts concerning the state of religious freedom in Xinjiang and Tibet. In November, the embassy highlighted that the President raised concerns regarding PRC practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong in his Bali meeting with Xi Jinping; PRC censors quickly removed related posts on WeChat and Weibo. A December 10 statement by the Ambassador stressing U.S. support for fundamental rights, including religious freedom, received more than four million views on Weibo and Twitter. In total, embassy posts amplifying religious freedom initiatives garnered over nine million views and almost 200,000 engagements. The tone of the comments from Chinese social media users was largely critical of embassy posts, especially concerning Xinjiang and Tibet issues, yet the coverage presented the U.S. perspective to a wide Chinese audience.

In February, the United States joined several nations that declined to send diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games due to concerns with what the presidential press secretary described as the government's "ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses."

On March 21, the Secretary of State announced visa restrictions against unspecified government officials "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, policies or actions aimed at repressing religious and spiritual practitioners, members of ethnic minority groups, dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, labor organizers, civil society organizers, and peaceful protestors" in the country. The Secretary's statement said the Department of State was acting against the government officials "for their involvement in repressive acts against members of ethnic and religious minority groups and religious and spiritual practitioners inside and outside of China's borders, including within the United States."

On June 21, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act came into force, blocking products, goods, and material originating from Xinjiang from entering the United States due to the risk that they were produced using forced labor. On June 17, the Department of Homeland Security released the *Strategy to Prevent the Importation of Goods Mined, Produced, or Manufactured with Forced Labor in the People's Republic of China*. Announcing the strategy, the Secretary of Homeland

Security said, “Our department is committed to ending the abhorrent practice of forced labor around the globe, including in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where the People’s Republic of China continues to systemically oppress and exploit Uyghurs and other Muslim-majority communities.”

On December 9, the Department of State announced sanctions and visa restrictions against three current and former officials for serious human rights abuses in Tibet, including particularly serious violations of religious freedom, and the arbitrary detention of Falun Gong practitioners in Chongqing. The officials were Wu Yingjie, party secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region from 2016-2021, Zhang Hongbo, director of the Tibetan Public Security Bureau, and Tang Yong, former deputy director of the Chongqing Area Prisons.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 30, 2022, 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.