On-the-Record Briefing by John Shattuck,
Assistant Secretary of State For Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
Washington, D.C., July 22, 1997

MR. BURNS: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome to the State Department. We have a two-pronged briefing today. The first will start with our Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck, who will present to you our report on United States Policies In Support of Religious Freedoms Overseas, with a particular focus on Christians.

Then following his briefing, which I think should go around 20 minutes, we'll take a couple minutes' break - maybe two or three minutes only - and then I will come out and will do our regular briefing on general foreign policy issues. I just want to say, since this is my last day here, it's really been a particular pleasure to work with John Shattuck. He's a man of great integrity. He brings, I think, a lot of credibility -- given his background, given his commitment to the issue of human rights - a lot of credibility to all of us who work with him in the Department of State.

I just wanted to thank John for all the help he's been to me over the last two and a half years. Without further ado, John Shattuck.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: I want to thank Nick for those kind remarks and, much more importantly, present him on his last day with a special gift -- the universal declaration of human rights, which I think will be a useful thing; which he knows by heart, but I want to make sure that he has it in his pocket at all times.

MR. BURNS: Thank you. Thanks, John.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Of course, Nick Burns is legendary and it's been a great privilege to work with him in my field. I know all my colleagues around the building feel the same way. So let me start my briefing by paying special tribute to Nick.

I'm pleased to be here to talk to you today about the issue of religious freedom, which is an issue of concern to the Administration and to the American people. Today we are issuing a report which sets out what the Administration is doing to promote religious freedom. This is a subject of special importance in this very volatile post-Cold War world in which we all live, in which our foreign policy interests as well as our values and the values of billions of people around the globe, I think, all depend on finding ways of promoting greater freedom of religion as well as reconciliation among religious groups so that instability in various settings will not be as severe as sometimes it is.

The report that we've issued today was prepared in fulfillment of a congressional mandate. It includes information on religious persecution in all parts of the world. At the congressional request, the report has a focus on Christians. But I want to stress, in releasing it, that Administration policy
and our actions around the world support religious freedom globally and apply to all religions and beliefs. Freedom of religion is not an American value only. It is a universally recognized human right. The universal declaration of human rights and many human rights treaties grant all citizens of the world the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

With the release of this report, I'd like to highlight ten points about what we have been doing in recent months and years to promote religious freedom around the world. This is not an exhaustive list, but I think it demonstrates that promoting religious freedom is an integral part of foreign policy under the leadership of Secretary Albright, who has, of course, written the introduction to this report and has made this a topic of great personal interest and concern to her as well as to our foreign policy.

First, President Clinton and Secretary Albright have publicly identified religious freedom as a foreign policy priority.

Second, we now include religious freedom in our annual human rights reports and have publicly condemned specific acts and policies of persecution in various parts of the world through our reports and our public statements.

Third, Secretary Albright has issued formal instructions to all U.S. diplomatic posts to give more attention to religious freedom both in their reporting and in their advocacy.

Fourth, the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State and other State Department officials at all levels have raised problems of persecution of individuals and groups in meetings with foreign leaders and their representatives.

Fifth, the United States has taken the lead in raising the issue of religious freedom in the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. U.S. leadership led to the appointment of a UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion.

Sixth, U.S. policies and programs aimed at assisting the development of free and democratic societies now expressly include fostering the climate of tolerance and openness where religious freedom can thrive.

Seventh, we are providing funding, for example, through U.S.I.A. exchanges, for programs that promote inter-faith dialogue, understanding and tolerance.

Eighth, we maintain ongoing dialogue with religious leaders and advocates of religious freedom in all parts of the world. The President, the Vice President and the Secretary have met with prominent religious leaders visiting the United States. We have asked our embassies around the world to stay in contact with leading religious figures.

Ninth, we have increased U.S. efforts to protect persons who fear persecution for activities motivated by their religious conviction. In this context, we are working closely with the
Immigration and Naturalization Service to ensure that the issue of religious persecution figures prominently in the asylum process.

Tenth -- and certainly among our most important efforts to advance religious freedom - is our work to promote peace and resolve ethnic and religious conflict. From Bosnia to Northern Ireland to the Middle East, the United States and many other countries have been in the forefront of efforts to foster peace and reconciliation in efforts of conflict marked by religious overtones. We will continue and intensify these efforts, which we regard as essential for creating conditions for the unimpeded practice of religious freedom.

In addition to these ten steps which provide a nutshell summary of our activities, I want to mention a particularly important new initiative of both Secretary Christopher and now Secretary Albright. That is the creation of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, which I chair. I'm sure most of you are familiar with the committee, which held its first meeting in February and has had several meetings since. It consists of a group of distinguished American leaders of religion, religious, academic and advocacy communities across the political spectrum, representing all major religions in the United States. It's been hard at work conducting hearings and formulating recommendations in this area.

The advisory committee is an important new step towards dialogue, information gathering and partnership between government and religious institutions in addressing persecution and promoting conflict resolution and respect for human rights. We look forward to its preliminary recommendations later this year. Later this week, when I am in the Balkans - in Bosnia and Croatia - I will be meeting with religious leaders in the region as part of the effort that the United States is engaged in to promote reconciliation.

The issue of persecution is a serious one, affecting many religions. The issue has not previously received much attention with respect to Christians. The focal report of this report, at the request of Congress, is that subject. But let me underscore again that the U.S. commitment to religious freedom encompasses all religions. We vigorously take up the cause of Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus and others, and certainly Christians. The United States is a country of many faiths. Freedom of religion and belief is deeply ingrained as one of our core values and the United States will stand firmly with many other countries on the side of religious freedom wherever it is threatened.

Thank you, and I'd be happy to answer questions.

QUESTION: Thank you, Secretary Shattuck. Speaking to the issue of Russia and the new restrictive laws of the Duma, in the report it says that you had an opportunity to speak with your Russian counterpart back in May, I believe. Can you bring us up to date now - I believe this legislation is ready to be signed. Have you heard from the Russians recently on this matter?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Well, as you know, U.S. Government officials, including the President and most recently Secretary Albright in her meeting with Mr. Primakov last week, and I in my discussions with my counterpart, have conveyed our serious concern -
grave concern - about the draft Russian religion law that would discriminate against a variety of religious groups. It's now pending before President Yeltsin.

We have joined with the OSCE countries in raising concerns about the draft law. We've worked with many other countries. We're working with those elements of Russian society that are supportive of religious pluralism and tolerance. I want to reiterate that, as I know Nick Burns has done from this podium several times, we hope that President Yeltsin will do everything possible to prevent this bill from becoming law. We don't have any new information about developments in that area.

QUESTION: John, there are a number of groups around this town that are pushing the proposition that Christians are the most persecuted of any of the religious groups in the world. The focus of this report and the congressional mandate that brought it about seems to support that view. Do you agree with that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: The issue of persecution of Christians, I think, has received very little treatment in terms of fact-gathering in the past. It has been a subject in our human rights reports, but very few other places. For that reason, it is valuable to bring out that aspect of religious persecution.

But as I said earlier, this is a subject that's very broad and involves issues of freedom of religion for all religions. The United States is deeply committed to the process of promoting freedom of religion for all religions. This is not a topic that relates only or even primarily to one religion. The fact that this specific report focuses on facts that have not heretofore been brought forward, I think, is a useful exercise; and one that we find to be a contribution to this. But Secretary Albright's leadership in this area and the appointment of an advisory committee representing all major religions - 20 major figures -- we can make available to you the names of all the members, of course - I think is an example of how we do not focus on any one issue at the exclusion of others.

QUESTION: Is that a no, then?

QUESTION: Can we follow on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Yeah, we do not see this topic as more important than other topics involving religious freedom.

QUESTION: John?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Yeah.

QUESTION: Is it your experience, from the human rights reports - although this is a slightly different exercise - that these have a real impact in places where there is a great deal of criticism; for example, in this report, China or Russia?
ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: These reports - and of course they come from many different sources -- the United States Government is one of the sources - can be very valuable. The shining of a spotlight on issues of human rights abuse is one of the major instruments for promoting human rights in our world. And particularly when there is so much information moving around the globe through various media, it's very important to shine the spotlight and it can prove to be quite valuable, and certainly valuable in very specific ways of promoting freedom of religion in any particular country.

QUESTION: Just to follow up -- do you mind highlighting what countries have been causing the most problem? There are reports of persecution in the Sudan of Christians, Russia, of course. If you would give us a synopsis, I'd appreciate it.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Yes. Frankly, I'm going to let the report speak for itself, just because I don't want to start balancing one country against another. I don't think that's valuable. This report covers 78 countries. One of the reasons it has taken a while to produce is that it's very difficult to gather information in that way. And we've covered all the countries where there was any indication of a problem or a registration requirement that appeared in our human rights reports in 1996. I think the text of the report speaks for itself. There are 78 countries that are included.

QUESTION: What about the Sudan where they have been burning Christian churches?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: The Sudan is certainly a serious issue involving freedom of religion. There's no question about it. In fact, just today I've sent my Deputy Assistant Secretary Gare Smith, to travel to the Sudan on a mission involving freedom of religion and others. Yes, Tom.

QUESTION: There's a school of thought, as you well know, that says that an exercise like this has nothing to do with the vital strategic or economic interests of the United States, and essentially it put us in the purpose of being a kind of global busybody. What do you say to that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: I fundamentally disagree, and I know so does Secretary Albright and the President. This effort to spotlight issues of human rights not only in broad thematic terms, but in specific terms involving facts and circumstances where human rights have been abused, has everything to do with the broad strategic interests of the United States; particularly in the post-Cold War world where we have a great national interest in looking at all the sources of potential instability in the world. And certainly, religious persecution is one of those sources. So we also have an interest in looking at ways of promoting cross-religious dialogue, and that's something we're doing very intensively in Bosnia and the Middle East and in Northern Ireland, among other places. So this exercise is at the heart of our foreign policy interests.

QUESTION: Can I follow that with another question about a criticism, which is that - first of all, I realize this was done in response to a mandate from Congress. But some people are beginning to wonder if this interest in religion is beginning to break down the firewall between church and
state in the United States, particularly with the emphasis in the mandate on Christianity and its persecution.

One, do you think there is any danger of breaking down that firewall? And two, what steps are you, as head of this committee and in your other job, doing to make sure it doesn't weaken that wall?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: The principle of the separation of church and state is one of the bedrock principles of our country, and it is a principle that we will follow very studiously throughout this process. We are consulting with religious organizations, just as we are consulting with nongovernmental organizations, in many aspects of our foreign policy. And that's why the Secretary has set up her Advisory Committee on Freedom of Religion.

There will be no sponsorship or endorsement of any religion or of, indeed, religion, as such. The United States, in establishing this advisory committee and in putting out this report, is looking at an issue of basic human rights, very similar to other human rights areas that we have looked at. But frankly, this has not received as much attention in the past as I think it deserves today because it is such a significant issue of human rights. But the separation of church and state will govern all aspects of our relationship here.

QUESTION: We were on China for a minute, and then we went to the Sudan. But when you met with officials in China, were you encouraged by the language you were hearing from them? Because I notice that, also referring back to the report, that China got quite a lengthy sort of spotlight, if you will? Were you encouraged by your dialogue? And is China going to go down a different path, or how is this report going to help China?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Well, China is a very big country, and China is certainly, like all other countries in this report, receiving attention, in terms of what activities have occurred in China vis-à-vis religious persecution. I think this is not a report that focuses on China any more than it focuses on any other one country. But those who are seeking to exercise basic rights of freedom of religion in China, as elsewhere, should take heart from the fact that such a report has been produced.

QUESTION: In Latin America, supposedly, in the last ten, 15 years, religious persecution has decreased. Do you agree with this? And if there are any cases left, are they being persecuted by the state or by individuals?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Well, I think you will find a number of Latin American countries covered in this report. I think, by and large the situation for human rights and democracy in Latin America over the last five or six years has been one of steady improvement. We welcome that; we applaud that. In fact, I think, to a large extent, that is reflected in this report. But there continue to be issues of religious persecution. I'm going to let the report speak for itself on that.
QUESTION: Are there any cases left, for example, of persecution between Catholics and Evangelists, for example?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Again, I'm going to let you refer - you're interested in Latin America. The Latin American countries are well covered, as is what the United States is doing in relationship with the Latin countries on this subject.

Yeah, one more question.

QUESTION: A number of your critics would say a report is all well and good, but the Administration's actions have been sort of tepid notwithstanding your ten points. For example, the President did meet with the Dalai Lama, but it was a drop-by; it wasn't an official visit. He hasn't really pressed those kinds of things. Could you answer that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Well, I think there has been no Administration that has focused more on this topic than the Clinton Administration. The new emphasis that it's receiving in the second administration and the fact that the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State are meeting with religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama is one element of that focus. Yeah.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, why is your systematically - (inaudible) -- the size in Greece based only on individual like Nikodomos Tsarknias, who is a very well-known tool of political propaganda of Skopje and has not to do anything with the religion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: I'm going to let the report speak for itself. I'm not going to comment on individual cases.

QUESTION: Do you know how large is -

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: I'm sorry, that - please, go ahead.

QUESTION: How large is the Greek minority - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - of Greek Orthodox faith? I asked a couple of - (inaudible) - so far there is no answer.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Again, I will let the report speak for itself. If you want to have further conversations after you've had an opportunity to review it, I'm sure there will be officials who can speak with you about it. One more question.

QUESTION: What particular efforts are you going to make to monitor the situation in Hong Kong, after the handover, with regards to religious freedom?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Well, there will be a constant stream of visitors to Hong Kong from the United States and many other countries who have a great interest in continued issues of religious freedom and human rights in Hong Kong. That topic will be very much on their agenda. Thank you.
United States Policies in Support of Religious Freedom:
Focus on Christians

Report Consistent with the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act,
Fiscal Year 1997, House Report 3610
Released by the
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Affairs,

Foreword by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright

Religious liberty, the freedom to proclaim a religious identity and practice it without fear, is an aspiration and an inalienable right of people everywhere. When practiced with tolerance, it can be one of the keys to a stable, productive society. But generations of hatred may be sown when it is delayed or denied. It is central to the strength of free peoples. Its protection and promotion are important elements of America's support for human rights around the globe.

First, because the right to profess and practice one's religion is basic to the life of every human being and is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Second, people who are free to profess their beliefs without fear and to live by them without impediment will do more to enrich their societies than people held back by prejudice. Where the rights of persons of any faith are not secure, no one's rights are secure. And violent persecution that begins with one group all too often engulfs whole nations in conflict.

And third, freedom of religion is central to American history and identity. Because our country has chosen ever since its creation to stand for universal principles of tolerance and liberty, free people around the world have chosen to stand with us.

That is why our commitment to religious liberty is even more than the expression of American ideals: it is a fundamental source of our strength in the world. We simply could not lead without it. We would be naive to think that we could advance our interests without it.

To fulfill this commitment, we are working actively to promote tolerance of legitimate religious expression for adherents of every faith. We have not hesitated to speak out when governments persecute Christians or fail to ensure the safety of any religious group. And we use all the tools available to work for change within societies and with authorities around the world.

The State Department is also committed to making full use of international organizations both to spotlight violations of the rights of Christians or others, and to promote religious tolerance and cooperation among faith communities.

We have changed the way the State Department looks at religious questions, in order to strengthen our opposition to violations of religious freedom in our bilateral relationships and our efforts to shape the work of international organizations. We have asked our embassies to provide more
frequent, more systematic and more sensitive reporting on religious issues -- and we are rewarding officers who make this a priority. We have increased the attention devoted to religious persecution in our annual human rights reports. And we have improved our procedures for reviewing requests for asylum -- reviewers are more aware that applicants may be victims of religious persecution.

Of course, we at the State Department recognize that we are not alone in this struggle. Without the efforts of churches and other religious organizations, human rights groups and concerned individuals in the United States and around the world, we could not document abuses. Without their love of justice, we would prevail less often.

For all those reasons, we are doing more to work with non-governmental groups. In November of 1996, Secretary Christopher established the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. That group of eminent religious figures, scholars and activists is helping the Department to better understand and respond to problems of persecution where they exist, and to recognize and provide support to religious leaders who are seeking to build tolerance, prevent conflict, and achieve reconciliation in their own societies.

The struggle for religious liberty does not end when our own freedom is assured. As Thomas Jefferson put it 200 years ago, "it behooves all who value liberty of conscience for themselves to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or that case may, by change of circumstance, become their own."

I thank Congress for its interest in this issue. And I look forward to working closely together to promote religious liberty for Christians, and for all people, around the world.

**UNITED STATES POLICIES IN SUPPORT OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:**

*Focus on Christians*

**Overview**

The United States Government upholds the principle that the freedom of religion, conscience, and belief is an inalienable and fundamental human right. Religious persecution is an intolerable invasion of an individual's basic human rights, and promoting freedom of religion and combating religious persecution are high priorities for the U.S. Government. President Clinton declared in his proclamation of Religious Freedom Day on January 16, 1997: "America's commitment to religious tolerance has empowered us to achieve an atmosphere of understanding, trust, and respect in a society of diverse cultures and religious traditions. And today, much of the world still looks to the United States as the champion of religious liberty."

Religious tolerance and respect for those who hold different beliefs are central elements of the American experience and our nation's core values. Indeed, the search for freedom of religion was a key factor in the settlement of colonial America. Today, these values go hand-in-hand with our interest in assisting the evolution of stable, democratic governments in all parts of the world. If people lack freedom of conscience and are unable to practice their faith, it is likely that other human rights will be restricted and that intolerance and violence will be more prevalent. Lack of
these rights also impedes efforts to establish societies that promote liberty and justice. Accordingly, the U.S. Government actively works to integrate the promotion of freedom of conscience and religion, the support of religious tolerance, and the elimination of persecution as central elements of our global diplomacy.

Unfortunately, both governments and members of different communities in many parts of the world continue to persecute religious groups. In some instances, religious persecution is due to governments that do not tolerate independent thought, belief systems, or freedom of association. In other instances, political leaders have exploited religious and ethnic differences for self-serving and sometimes violent political ends. At times, political rhetoric and manipulation have exacerbated disputes between members of different religions--or between members of different groups within the same religion.

At the same time, many religious communities are actively engaged in promoting tolerance and religious freedom and in trying to resolve conflicts among groups. Such efforts are testimony to the strength of the human spirit, and complement government efforts to ensure that all persons are able to practice their faith as they choose.

The U.S. Government is concerned about incidents in which any individuals or groups are persecuted because of their religion or belief. This Administration has intensified efforts to address the issue of freedom of religion and to promote religious freedom in a number of ways. On a global scale, we have urged adherence to international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides for the right of all persons to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom--either alone or in community with others, and either in public or private--to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

We have highlighted and condemned religious persecution in our multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. Through private diplomatic efforts and public condemnation the U.S. Government has secured the release of and improvement in the treatment of individuals of various religions and beliefs who have faced incarceration, harassment, or other forms of abuse. At international fora, U.S. delegations have emphasized the importance of religious tolerance and reconciliation, and the need for multilateral opposition to the persecution of persons on the basis of their religious beliefs or practices. The White House, the Department of State and other agencies of the U.S. Government have issued official statements to spotlight incidents of religious persecution on a regular basis, and the U.S. Government provides a detailed summary of such abuses each year in the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. We are also intensifying efforts to improve the review process for asylum and refugee applications.

An important step in highlighting religious freedom was the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad in 1996 by Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The White House announced the formation of the Committee and the members met with President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton prior to their first official meeting. The significance of the Committee's work was emphasized by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who addressed the inaugural meeting in February 1997. The twenty leaders of religious,
academic, and advocacy communities who are members of the Committee are formulating recommendations to the U.S. Government on means of advancing religious freedom throughout the world, with a focus on eliminating religious persecution and supporting the promotion of human rights and conflict resolution. The Committee will submit its final report to the Secretary of State and the President. The Committee convened its second official meeting in July and has held working group sessions in various parts of the country.

Our human rights objectives are also advanced through U.S. assistance programs to organizations that monitor and promote human rights, facilitate cultural and educational exchanges, and strengthen the rule of law, justice, civil society and good governance. The U.S. Government encourages other sectors of society, including the U.S. business community and the labor movement, to help advance human rights. And we support international broadcasting programs that disseminate human rights information throughout the world, including in countries where individual liberty and freedom are restricted.

The approaches used to promote religious freedom and combat violations of this right differ depending on the situation in each country. In some instances, the U.S. Government is able to raise problems of religious persecution directly with foreign governments. In other instances, such as where we do not have formal diplomatic relations, the U.S. Government's ability to press for redress is limited to acts in multilateral fora or to coordinated efforts with other governments that do have diplomatic relations with the country in question. In cases of inter-communal tension and strife, or action by individuals, in which foreign governments are not direct participants, the U.S. Government's ability to intervene is limited.

This report summarizes U.S. Government actions to promote religious freedom and to counter religious intolerance, discrimination, and persecution, with a focus on the protection of Christians from persecution, as requested by Congress. It is not an exhaustive list of all U.S. Government activities in this area. An annex to the report provides a summary of the current situation and bilateral initiatives in a number of countries. In some instances, there are no reports of religious persecution, but policies exist that could impact Christians and members of other religious and belief communities. In addition, the omission of a country from this report does not imply that incidents of discrimination, intolerance, or persecution against Christians or members of other faith communities does not occur. The report draws from the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and information gathered in recent months, both officially and unofficially; every effort was made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. In accordance with the congressional request, the emphasis in the annex is on the situation Christians face and actions taken by the U.S. Government.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH ACTIONS

Presidential Initiatives

The U.S. Government has regularly and publicly affirmed its commitment to promote freedom of religion and combat religious persecution around the world. The President has made the issue of religious liberty a key part of our human rights message in multilateral fora. First Lady Hillary
Rodham Clinton has also participated in several initiatives that highlighted the importance of the right to religious freedom.

The President and the Vice President have raised the issue directly with leaders of other governments. In June 1997 at the Denver Summit of the Eight, for example, President Clinton raised the issue with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and expressed his concern about a legislative initiative in the Russian Duma that would curtail religious liberty in Russia. Vice President Gore raised the issue of religious freedom and persecution during his trip to Beijing in March 1997. Both the President and the Vice President have also privately voiced their concern about religious persecution in conversations with foreign leaders. Their direct interventions have made the concern of the U.S. Government known at the highest levels of foreign governments.

The President has regularly hosted meetings attended by representatives of many religions, including leaders from Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Mormon, and other Christian communities, as well as leaders of Jewish, Islamic, Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, and other faiths. For example, the President has met with the Dalai Lama, Pope John Paul II, Bishop Belo, and other eminent religious leaders. Such meetings provide an opportunity to discuss crucial issues affecting Christians and other religious communities. They are also a means of gathering information that can be used in U.S. diplomatic efforts to advance religious freedom.

Under the President's leadership, the U.S. Government has undertaken key diplomatic initiatives in countries where religious communities have come into conflict. U.S. leadership has been critical to peace processes in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East. The President has also strongly supported religious reconciliation and inter-faith cooperation in countries torn by conflict. The First Lady inaugurated the first inter-faith humanitarian initiative in Bosnia during her January 1996 visit.

For some men and women, termination of pregnancy may violate important spiritual beliefs. In 1994, President Clinton directed that the United States provide administrative protection from return for those fleeing coercive family planning practices. In 1996, the President signed legislation providing statutory protection for such victims.

The President's strong commitment to religious liberty is reflected in domestic initiatives to expand and strengthen religious freedom in the United States. For example, the President has traditionally issued a proclamation designating January 16 as Religious Freedom Day, celebrating the diversity of spiritual beliefs that flourish in the United States, and underscoring the profound commitment to religious freedom of the United States.

**Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad**

In November 1996, Secretary of State Christopher established the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. The White House announced the formation of the Advisory Committee to call attention to problems of religious persecution around the world and to efforts for bringing about reconciliation in regions where religious enmity is a threat to peace, and to provide innovative policy recommendations for the U.S. Government to address these issues. The
Advisory Committee carries forward the commitment of the United States to advance religious freedom, help those suffering under repression, support the forces of tolerance, and promote reconciliation among the many communities of faith.

Both the President and the First Lady met with members of the Advisory Committee in January and February 1997. In her address at the Advisory Committee's inaugural meeting in February, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright emphasized the importance of the Committee's work and underscored the U.S. Government's commitment to making religious liberty a priority issue in our human rights policy (a point she had emphasized in one of her first statements as Secretary of State in January).

The Advisory Committee is chaired by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor John Shattuck and is composed of 20 members who represent a wide spectrum of beliefs and areas of expertise on religion and human rights. The members include representatives of Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, and other Christian faiths. In addition there are clergy and academics representing, and familiar with, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other world religious traditions.

The Advisory Committee is a venue for religious organizations, including many associated with various Christian denominations, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are interested in religious liberty, to engage with the U.S. Government on this issue. The Advisory Committee held its second formal meeting in July of this year and has established working groups which have met regularly over the past several months to pursue the Committee's goals.

The Advisory Committee is focusing on two issues for its first report: 1) problems of religious persecution and discrimination, and 2) the role of religious groups in conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the promotion of conditions that permit freedom of religion. The Advisory Committee will submit its findings and policy recommendations to the Secretary of State, who will share the report with the President.

**Country Reports on Human Rights Practices**

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices is the State Department's annual review that assesses human rights conditions in countries around the world; 194 reports are prepared. This compilation provides an evaluation of human rights conditions on a global basis, and puts the analyses made by the U.S. Government on the public record. The Country Reports has gained wide and increasing acceptance as a comprehensive, reliable, and balanced summation of human rights conditions around the world.

The individual reports for each country include specific sections on freedom of religion and discuss religious persecution where it exists, whether due to governmental abuse, societal discrimination, or inter-communal tension. The Country Reports is prepared for presentation to Congress by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor based on information provided by U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, officials based in Washington, and non-governmental sources. In an effort to provide as comprehensive and accurate a report as possible, the
Department has taken steps in recent years to expand the coverage in the Country Reports and has consulted with interested congressional offices and representatives of non-governmental organizations regarding additional points and issues in the area of religious freedom that might be included in the reports.

**Reporting on Religious Persecution**

In 1993 the Secretary of State instructed all embassies to establish inter-agency committees on human rights. In recent months, the State Department has made additional efforts to aggressively pursue issues of religious freedom in the field. In December 1996, the Department alerted all U.S. diplomatic missions to the establishment of the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, underscored the importance of religious freedom as one of our worldwide human rights objectives, and urged increased reporting on problems in the area of religious freedom. Posts were asked to give special attention in their reporting to specifying the religions or denominations that are targets of discrimination and persecution. In 1997, U.S. Missions abroad were again instructed to give careful attention to issues of religious freedom, to increase their reporting, and to focus also on treatment of non-traditional religions and sects. As a result of these instructions there has been an increase in the reporting from posts on issues of religious freedom and religious persecution.

In 1996 the Department inaugurated a special award to recognize Foreign Service Officers for exceptional reporting and personal effort in support of initiatives that promote respect for human rights and the development of democracy. Among the four officers whose 1996 performance was recognized, two were commended for their outstanding work with, and on behalf of, members of religious minorities, including Christians, in Turkey and Cuba.

**Asylum Adjudication**

Under U.S. immigration law, asylum may be granted to persons with a well-founded fear of persecution, based on one (or more) of five protected grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. Over the past two years, the Department of State has worked with the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Executive Office of Immigration Review to help streamline the Department's role in the asylum adjudication process. The Office of Asylum Affairs in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor has developed more than 50 profiles of country conditions and asylum claims covering the countries that generate approximately 90% of all asylum claims. The profiles have amplified and focused the information available to asylum adjudicators, including information on religious persecution. At the same time, changes in the asylum adjudication regulations that went into effect in 1995 have significantly increased the speed with which asylum cases are decided.

The profiles are under constant review to ensure that they take into account changing human rights conditions, new developments in asylum law, and the major categories of human rights violations cited in asylum claims. Issues of religious persecution figure prominently in this ongoing evaluation.
Business Principles

The American business community is in a unique and strategic position to promote human rights around the world. Accordingly, we have worked to promote the President's Model Business Principles among U.S. businesses, thus underscoring the U.S. Government's view that human rights and economic development are complementary, not contradictory, and that a good human rights environment supports and promotes a good business environment.

In June 1997, the U.S. Government presented the first annual Best Global Practices Award to Asia Pacific Resources, Inc. (APR), whose president is Mr. John Kamm. APR was recognized for its efforts to obtain the release of individuals detained or imprisoned by the Chinese authorities for exercising their right to free expression, including their religious beliefs, and for its aggressive advocacy before the business community and the Chinese public in encouraging respect for human rights. The award ceremony was hosted by the Department of Commerce, in cooperation with the Department of State and other U.S. Government agencies.

Broadcasting

Through Radio Free Asia, the Voice of America, and the U.S. Information Agency, we regularly broadcast editorials to promote religious freedom and other human rights, and report on activities in the United States and at international fora that address issues of religious freedom, as well as religious intolerance, discrimination, and persecution. The dissemination of information is a valuable and essential tool for promoting our human rights objectives, particularly in countries where freedom is restricted.

Foreign Assistance Programs

The U.S. Government provides assistance to support the work of organizations monitoring violations of human rights and promoting respect for human rights so that religious freedom can flourish. While some of these programs are specifically targeted at the issue, others are broader in scope but still impact positively on the problem. For example, grants are provided to facilitate conflict resolution, establish the rule of law and justice, strengthen civil society and good governance, provide education on basic human rights and promote reconciliation. These initiatives also serve to reinforce the importance of legal protection for religious practices and the valuable role of non-governmental organizations.

The U.S. Government has also strongly supported religious reconciliation and inter-faith cooperation in countries torn by conflict. The first inter-faith humanitarian initiative in Bosnia was inaugurated by the First Lady during her visit there in January 1996.

The U.S. Government has supported educational and cultural exchange programs that promote religious liberty and tolerance. For example, U.S. Information Service (USIS) posts have sent clerics, journalists, politicians and academics to the United States to participate in an annual International Visitors Program on "Religion in America," in which they meet with American
Christian, Muslim, Jewish and ecumenical groups to discuss ways of promoting religious tolerance.

**BILATERAL DIPLOMACY**

The Department of State uses a range of policy tools to advance human rights generally and religious freedom in particular. Instances of human rights violations, including religious persecution, are frequently the focus of action by the Department and U.S. embassies abroad.

The Department carefully monitors and gathers information on the status of all human rights, including religious freedom, in all countries of the world. To enhance these efforts, U.S. embassies have been instructed to include prominent religious leaders among their contacts. When rights are violated, the Department speaks out publicly. While the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices provides the most extensive and systematic public description of violations, the Department Spokesman and embassy officials abroad also comment regularly and publicly on instances of religious persecution. These U.S. views are conveyed directly to governments. In addition, public diplomacy in support of religious freedom is advanced through the programs of the U.S. Information Agency and broadcasting by the Voice of America.

U.S. Government officials often raise problems of religious freedom or religious persecution with foreign government officials. The Department has instructed embassies in many countries to enter into dialogue with their host government on religious freedom issues. In several countries, embassies have raised systemic problems with governments, such as broad discrimination against members of certain religious groups, legislation that infringes on religious liberties, or government interference with church affairs. U.S. Ambassadors and other officials have encouraged governments to state publicly their opposition to acts of violence or discrimination against religious groups. U.S. embassies also frequently raise with host governments specific cases of persecution of individuals for the peaceful practice of their religion.

Beyond such direct intervention with foreign governments on behalf of religious freedom, U.S. foreign policy in general, and human rights policy in particular, seeks to develop and strengthen peaceful and democratic societies which foster an atmosphere conducive to religious freedom. Our multifaceted efforts to build democratic institutions are aimed in part at creating a framework for greater tolerance. In this manner, democracy projects sponsored by both the State Department and the Agency for International Development, as well as U.S. Information Agency exchange programs, contribute in substantial ways to U.S. efforts to expand religious freedom.

Religious persecution remains a serious problem in many countries. The annex to this report provides specific examples that illustrate the types of bilateral actions the U.S. Government has taken to promote religious freedom and oppose religious discrimination, intolerance, and persecution throughout the world, with a particular focus on the situation for Christians, as requested by Congress. While this is not an exhaustive list, the countries included in this report provide a representative sample of the types of restrictions, harassment, and persecution that exist in different regions, and the types of U.S. Government actions taken against religious persecution. The selection of these countries was based on expressions of concern by congressional and non-
governmental observers, and data reported in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Additional details on the status of religious freedom in these and other countries can be found in the Country Reports.

MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

United Nations Human Rights Commission

At the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), the United States Government has traditionally co-sponsored an annual resolution that condemns acts of hatred, violence, intolerance, and discrimination based on religion or belief, and reaffirms that freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief are fundamental human rights derived from the inherent dignity of the person.

At the 1997 UNHRC meeting, the U.S. delegation made religious freedom one of its main thematic issues. The delegation delivered a strong statement on religious liberty and religious persecution, which included specific reference to the persecution of Christians in Sudan, Egypt, Iran, Vietnam, Pakistan, and China. The statement also cited other faiths that face persecution, including Tibetan Buddhists, Baha'is, Muslims, and Jews. The delegation worked successfully to incorporate language on religious freedom in several country-specific resolutions.

At the 1996 UNHRC meeting, the U.S. delegation devoted two of its major statements to the themes of religious freedom and intolerance. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Shattuck delivered a vigorous statement on religious freedom, emphasizing U.S. concern over the treatment of Christians and adherents of other faiths in many countries around the world. This was also the theme of a U.S. delegation speech on the implementation of the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance based on Religion or Belief.

The United States introduced the original resolution calling for the appointment of a U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance at the 42nd UNHRC in 1986. Since then, the U.S. Government has consistently supported the continuation of the Special Rapporteur's work and has repeatedly and successfully negotiated for extensions of the Special Rapporteur's mandate.

In addition, the United States has introduced, co-sponsored, and supported country resolutions that highlight religious persecution and violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief. For example, the 1996 and 1997 UNHRC resolutions on human rights abuses in Iran condemned the intimidation of Christian minorities, as well as assassinations. The resolutions on Sudan, and the draft resolutions on China, both sponsored by the United States, also condemned religious intolerance against Christians and others in those countries.

United Nations General Assembly

In 1996, as in past years, the United States co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) condemning religious intolerance. The U.S. Government also
supported an UNGA resolution on human rights abuses in Iran that highlighted violations committed against Christians and Baha'is.

**Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe**

The United States has raised the issue of religious freedom at a series of recent conferences of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), focusing attention on countries that have failed to protect the right to freedom of religion and highlighting specific instances of persecution or discrimination against Christians and adherents of other religions. At the OSCE Conference on the Human Dimension in Vienna, Austria, in November 1996, the U.S. delegation drew attention to the mistreatment of Christian minorities in Albania, Azerbaijan, and Greece.

**ANNEX**

As noted above, this annex provides a variety of examples that illustrate the types of bilateral actions the U.S. Government has taken to promote religious freedom and to eliminate religious discrimination, intolerance, and persecution throughout the world, with a particular focus on the situation for Christians, as requested by Congress. It is not an exhaustive list of all U.S. Government activities in this area, but provides a summary of the current situation and bilateral initiatives in a number of countries. The countries included in this summary provide a representative sample of the types of restrictions, harassment, and persecution that exist in different regions, and the types of U.S. Government actions taken against religious persecution. Religious persecution remains a serious problem in many countries. In some instances, there are no reports of religious persecution, but policies exist that could impact Christians and members of other religious and belief communities. In addition, the omission of a country from this report does not imply that incidents of discrimination, intolerance, or persecution against Christians or members of other faith communities does not occur.

The selection of the countries in this annex was based on expressions of concern by congressional and non-governmental observers, and data reported in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The report draws from the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and information gathered in recent months, both officially and unofficially; every effort was made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. In accordance with the congressional request, the emphasis in the annex is on the situation Christians face and actions taken by the U.S. Government. Additional details on the status of religious freedom in these and other countries can be found in the Country Reports.

**Afghanistan**

**Current situation:** Islam is the state religion. The small number of non-Muslim residents, mostly Hindus and Sikhs, may practice their religion but may not proselytize. There are very few Christian residents; most are foreigners.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. does not maintain an Embassy in Afghanistan. We have urged all factions in the Afghan civil war to observe basic human rights norms.
Algeria

**Current situation:** The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion but prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. The Government respects this right in practice. It permits the small Christian and Jewish populations to practice their faiths without interference.

Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. Because of security worries and potential legal and social problems, Muslim converts to other religions practice their new faith clandestinely. The Family Code prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, although this is not always enforced. The Code does not restrict Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women.

In 1994 the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an extremist group that seeks to topple the Government, declared its intention to eliminate Jews, Christians, and polytheists from Algeria. The Christian community, composed mostly of foreigners, curtailed its activities. Some church workers left the country because of GIA threats. During 1996 the GIA kidnapped and killed seven Roman Catholic monks in central Algeria, and the Catholic Bishop of Oran also was murdered at his home. During 1995 two Roman Catholic priests and three nuns were murdered, and a fourth nun was wounded by extremists. In October 1993 the GIA warned all foreigners to leave Algeria or face death. Members of the clergy were among the 90 foreigners killed in 1994.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States has an ongoing dialogue with the Algerian Government concerning human rights. In 1996 the State Department spokesman publicly condemned the murders of seven Trappist monks, who were kidnapped by GIA terrorists.

Armenia

**Current situation:** The Armenian constitution provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, the law imposes some restrictions on religious freedom, and the right to freedom of conscience is not fully protected. The 1991 law on religious organizations establishes the separation of church and state, but recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as having special status. Other Christian organizations continue to face problems as a result of the law and other factors. Some Armenian Orthodox clergy have reportedly made statements opposing the activities of non-Apostolic churches and other religions in recent years.

The 1991 law forbids proselytizing and requires all non-Apostolic religious organizations to register with the Government. Petitioning organizations must "be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature" and must subscribe to a doctrine based on "historically recognized holy scriptures." Parliament recently passed amendments to the 1991 law. If enacted, the amendments would have required non-ethnic based religious groups to re-register within 6 months, increased the minimum number of members from 100 to 200 for registration, forbidden the financing of non-Apostolic groups from abroad, and restricted membership in such groups to those over 18 years of age. These provisions would not have applied to certain religious organizations of ethnic minorities, such as Yezids, Jews, Greeks, and Russians. President Ter-Petrossian subsequently
declined to approve these amendments, and has sent them back to the parliament with a detailed list of objections and suggested changes.

A presidential decree issued in 1993 supplemented the 1991 law and strengthened the position of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The decree empowers the Council on Religious Affairs to investigate the activities of representatives of registered religious organizations and to ban missionaries who engage in activities contrary to their status. A religious organization refused registration cannot publish a newspaper or magazine, rent a meeting place, have its own programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors to Armenia.

The Armenian Government has not registered Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that the organization's charter is incompatible with current Armenian law on compulsory military service. As of June 1997, the total number of churches and religious organizations registered in Armenia was 43.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy has raised the subject of religious freedom with Armenian officials. Following the Parliament's recent approval of amendments to the law on religion, the Embassy expressed concern to a government official over the impact of these amendments on religious freedom in Armenia.

The U.S. Ambassador has met with President Levon Ter-Petrossian to urge greater attention to citizens' human rights and to convey the U.S. Government's concern about attacks on non-mainstream religious communities, both Christian and non-Christian. The Ambassador's intervention followed an incident in 1995 when paramilitary troops staged a series of attacks against members of a dozen non-Apostolic religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian. Paramilitary troops broke up services, beat and kidnapped pastors and adherents, and ransacked offices and stole equipment. The attacks were reportedly triggered by the perception that the religious groups that were targeted were opposed to the military draft. Several victims were hospitalized, and about 20 adherents were held for several days or weeks at a military police facility before being released. The President told the U.S. Ambassador that he had taken measures to ensure that these attacks would not be repeated. No subsequent attacks have been reported.

**Austria**

**Current situation:** Austrian law grants freedom of belief but limits the right to organize as a religious entity. There are 13 recognized religious organizations. To qualify as a religious organization, the Government must determine that the group meets certain religious criteria, will operate in full compliance with the Austrian legal code, and will not practice or preach ideas contrary to accepted social customs. Religious recognition offers important benefits such as exemption from property taxes, entitlement to state-collected church taxes, the right to engage in religious education, and immunity from securing work or residence permits for foreign religious workers who act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Non-recognized churches in Austria, including some Christian religious organizations, have been limited in their ability to sponsor U.S. religious workers in Austria. A government initiative to protect citizens from dangerous religious
cults or sects could lead to discrimination against certain religious groups not among the 13 officially recognized religious organizations, including Christian groups.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy has been very active in its support of non-recognized churches in Austria, and has discussed such matters with the Austrian Government. It has worked with U.S. representatives of a number of groups that had experienced difficulty in securing residence permits, and has suggested to the Austrian Government that it meet regularly with a single point of contact, an ombudsman who would present cases to the Government. As a result of this initiative, meetings were held between Austrian Government officials and the coalition of non-recognized groups, which produced agreement on a new, more acceptable set of procedures for the attainment of residence permits. While the issue of official recognition remains to be resolved, the new administrative process has proven very successful. The Austrian authorities have granted Baptist ministers, Quaker missionaries, and others the right to remain in Austria legally.

**Azerbaijan**

**Current situation:** Azerbaijan's constitution does not designate a state religion. It provides for the right of people of all faiths to practice their religion without restrictions, and the Government generally respects these rights. However, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict led in the late 1980's to rising anti-Armenian sentiment and the forced departure of most of the Armenian population, which has led to the closing of Armenian churches. A 1996 law on foreigners and stateless persons prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, although it is unclear how actively this law is being enforced.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Ambassador has repeatedly raised U.S. concerns about the law on proselytizing with top-level Azerbaijani officials, including President Heydar Aliyev, emphasizing that Azerbaijan's improving record on religious tolerance should be continued and urging the Government to allow both Azerbaijanis and foreigners to express their beliefs.

In 1996 the Ministry of Justice denied registration to a foreign Christian group, but allowed it to continue to function. The U.S. Ambassador intervened on behalf of the Christian group and specifically urged the Government to register the organization.

The U.S. Ambassador has both publicly and privately addressed discrimination against, and harassment of, Christians. The Ambassador publicly opposed a campaign against Christian missionary groups that emerged in the official and unofficial press in late 1996. The campaign was partially fueled by a statement allegedly made by the leader of the Armenian Church, who purportedly told Christian missionaries that they should leave Armenia and go to places where they were needed, such as Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Justice created problems when the missionary groups attempted to register, and landlords were pressured not to rent meeting places to missionary groups.

The U.S. Ambassador has also raised the issue of freedom of religion--and specifically the treatment of Christian missionary groups--with President Aliyev (particularly in two meetings in December 1996, but also in several other meetings that he has had with the President). The
Ambassador also pressed for religious freedom and fair treatment for Christian missionaries in meetings with Prosecutor General Eldar Hasanov, Minister of Interior Ramil Usubov, the Speaker of Parliament, presidential Legal Adviser Shahin Aliyev, Foreign Minister Hasan Hasanov, the Acting Minister of Justice, President Aliyev's National Security Adviser, and Sheik Al-Islam Pashazade, the religious leader of the Caucasus Muslims. In addition, the Ambassador has intervened in several matters with regard to religious freedom and has stressed the importance of human rights and religious freedom with local media.

**Bahrain**

Current situation: Islam is the state religion. However, Christians and other non-Muslims are free to practice their religion, maintain their own places of worship, and display the symbols of their religion. Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookshops. Some small groups worship in their homes. Notables from virtually every religion and denomination visit Bahrain and frequently meet with government and civic leaders.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims is discouraged, anti-Islamic writings are prohibited, and while conversion from Islam to other religions is not illegal, converts are subject to societal discrimination.

U.S. Government actions: The United States maintains an ongoing dialogue with Bahrain on human rights issues.

**Bangladesh**

Current situation: Islam is the state religion. However, the constitution provides for freedom of religion, and this right is respected in practice. Strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that many missionary efforts are directed at Hindus and tribal peoples. Christian missionaries sometimes face problems in obtaining visas. Religious minorities are disadvantaged in obtaining government jobs, though the extent of the problem is unknown.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Bangladesh, including respect for human rights.

**Belarus**

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, a July 1995 Cabinet of Ministers directive sharply limits the activity of foreign religious workers. Citizens are not prohibited from proselytizing, but foreign missionaries may not engage in religious activities outside the institutions that invited them. Only religious organizations already registered in Belarus may invite foreign clergy. This 1995 directive hampered foreign religious workers' efforts to proselytize; it seeks to limit them to providing humanitarian aid only.
The Cabinet of Ministers regulation is seen as a means of enhancing the position of the Orthodox Church with respect to the faster-growing Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, and also as a means of preventing religious movements outside the mainstream from spreading. President Aleksandr Lukashenko has granted special tax and other financial advantages to the Orthodox Church, which other denominations do not enjoy, and has declared the preservation and development of Orthodox Christianity a "moral necessity." In 1995, 50 Polish Roman Catholic priests were reportedly denied registration as foreign religious workers. There were no reports of such denial of registration in 1996. Bishops must receive permission from the State Committee on Religious Affairs before transferring a foreign priest to another parish. The head of the Orthodox Church, who is closely associated with the President, frequently speaks critically of missionaries.

Some difficulties still exist in transferring church property from state control back to the former owners.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Government regularly engages the Government of Belarus on a wide range of human rights issues and concerns. The Ambassador and other embassy officers maintain contacts with different Christian organizations at a range of levels.

**Belgium**

**Current situation:** The Government does not hinder the practice of any faith. The law accords "recognized" status to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Anglicanism, Islam, and Greek and Russian Orthodoxy. These recognized religions receive subsidies drawn from general government revenues. By law each recognized religion has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction in schools, but not all avail themselves of this right.

In April 1997, the Belgian Parliamentary Commission released a 670 page report on sects and the potential dangers they may pose to society and to individuals, especially minors. Defining a sect as "an organized group of persons who have the same doctrine at the heart of a religion," the report listed 189 organizations as fitting this definition, including Christian groups such as Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Opus Dei, Quakers, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Amish. The Commission differentiated among sects, harmful sectarian organizations, and criminal associations but made no distinction on the list. It recommended the creation of two entities to monitor sects: first, a task force to foster cooperation and coordination within the law enforcement community on intelligence about sects; and second, an independent center to observe sects and propose policy for fighting dangers they pose.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Government is following the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, especially as they pertain to the increased mandate for the judicial system to monitor those organizations suspected of posing a threat to society. The United States would be concerned if individuals were to be denied rights on the basis of belief or mere affiliation with a certain group, rather than on the basis of illegal acts.
Bhutan

**Current situation:** Buddhism is the state religion. Citizens of other faiths, mostly Hindus, enjoy freedom of worship but may not proselytize, and conversions are illegal. Foreign missionaries may not proselytize but international Christian relief organizations and Jesuit priests are active in educational and humanitarian activities.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States does not maintain diplomatic relations with Bhutan.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including private and public worship, and in the Federation the authorities rarely interfered. However, in Bosnia religion and ethnicity are so closely intertwined as to be inseparable. In general, individuals in their ethnic majority areas, who constitute the great majority of the population, enjoy unfettered freedom of religion. However, there were some incidents of inter-ethnic violence that resulted in damage to religious property. For example, in July 1996 a Roman Catholic church in the Muslim-controlled town of Bugojno was firebombed. It was reportedly the last Catholic church in the town. This act followed by a few days a fire that damaged a mosque in the Croat-controlled town of Prozor, and may have been in retaliation for the burning of the mosque. In the Republika Srpska abuse of ethnic minorities has been tantamount to official policy. The Croat Catholic minority has been subjected to numerous forms of harassment, including attacks on Catholic priests and nuns and desecration of religious property.

**U.S. Government actions:** U.S. Government officials have met with leading religious figures and have encouraged and sought to facilitate inter-faith initiatives to promote reconciliation. The United States is working constantly for reconciliation among all parties to the conflict and a lasting settlement that ensures that human rights are respected, including religious freedom.

Brunei

**Current situation:** The constitution states that the country's religion is the Shafeite sect of the Muslim religion, "provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them." In 1997 the Government sporadically voiced alarm about "outsiders" preaching radical Islamic fundamentalist or unorthodox beliefs. Citizens deemed to have been influenced by such preaching (usually students returning from overseas study), have been "shown the error of their ways" in study seminars organized by orthodox Islamic religious leaders. The Government seems more concerned about these so-called Islamic "opportunists" than unwelcome political views.

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government routinely restricts the practice of non-Muslim religions by prohibiting proselytizing; occasionally denying entry to foreign clergy or particular priests, bishops, or ministers; banning the import of religious teaching materials or scriptures such as the Bible; and refusing permission to expand, repair, or build new churches, temples, and shrines.

**Bulgaria**

Current situation: Although the constitution provides for freedom of religion, the Government restricts this right in practice for some non-Orthodox Christian groups, and discrimination against them increased during 1996. The ability of a number of religious groups to operate freely continued to come under attack, both as a result of government action and because of public intolerance. The government requirement that groups whose activities have a religious element register with the Council of Ministers remained an obstacle to the activity of some religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Word of Life, which have been denied registration. Despite several applications, no new religious denominations were registered in 1996.

The Government refused most requests for visas and residence permits for foreign missionaries, and some of them came under physical attack in the street and in their homes. The police response was indifferent, despite the expressed concern of the Government about such cases. Members of the Mormon church reported continued acts of harassment and assault, including some perpetrated by the police themselves. In April 1997, Bulgarian National Investigative Service officials confiscated religious materials and some personal belongings from several Mormon missionaries entering Bulgaria from the United States. In May one of the missionaries was arrested for possession of methamphetamine when he attempted to recover his possessions, including some vitamins. He was released on bail and his case remains open. Missionaries of Jehovah's Witnesses also reported an incident of beating by the police. In December 1995, a Jehovah's Witness mother living in Asenovgrad was denied custody of her son solely because of her religious beliefs. The woman has appealed to the Supreme Court.

On several occasions during 1996 the police shut down religious meetings of unregistered groups. In June the police broke up a Jehovah's Witness meeting at a public dance hall in Asenovgrad and confiscated religious material. In August the police raided a private hall in Sofia and closed down a meeting of Word of Life. Bibles and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were freely imported and printed, and Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish publications were published on a regular basis. Nevertheless, there were reports that police confiscated religious books and cassettes during searches of Word of Life members.

By order of the Minister of Education, a private religious elementary school located in Lovetch was closed in August 1996. The "School of Tomorrow" was run by the registered evangelical denomination "Shalom" (a group distinct from the Jewish community organization of the same name). According to Shalom, the school was part of a network of similar schools, founded by an American citizen and associated with several Protestant churches, in 108 countries.

U.S. Government actions: U.S. Government officials meet with religious groups that have experienced discrimination in Bulgaria, as well as with representatives of human rights organizations well versed in the problems that these groups face. The U.S. Government has privately and publicly
raised its concerns about the treatment of Christian evangelical groups in Bulgaria, including specific incidents, with the Bulgarian Government. At the OSCE Conference on the Human Dimension in Vienna in November 1996, the U.S. delegation protested discrimination against "non-traditional" religious groups, including the Word of Life Church and the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses, and, in a private meeting, called upon the Bulgarian Government to promote actively greater religious tolerance of all religious groups without exception.

**Burma**

**Current situation:** The Government imposes several severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Adherents of all religions that are duly registered with the authorities generally enjoy freedom to worship as they choose. However, religious publications, like secular ones, remain subject to control and censorship. Christian Bibles translated into indigenous languages cannot legally be imported or printed. It remains extremely difficult for Christian and Muslim groups to obtain permission to build new churches and mosques, and there were credible reports of incidents in which the Government removed cemeteries in constructing infrastructure projects in urban areas. Buddhists constitute the vast majority of citizens. Buddhist organizations are also subject to government monitoring and interference. In December 1996, the Government ordered the removal of Christian, Chinese, and Buddhist graves from the Kyandaw Cemetery in Rangoon to make way for a planned real estate development.

Religious groups have established links with coreligionists in other countries, although these activities are reportedly monitored by the Government. Foreign religious representatives are usually allowed visas only for short stays, but in some cases have been permitted to preach to congregations. Permanent foreign missionary establishments have not been permitted since the 1960's, but seven Catholic nuns and four priests working in Burma since before independence in January 1948 continue their work.

The Government monitors the activities of members of all religions, in part because such members have, in the past, become politically active. The Muslim and Christian religious minorities continued to be regarded with suspicion by the authorities. In particular, there is a concentration of Christians among the ethnic minorities against whom the army has fought for decades, such as the Karen. In recent months there have been increased reports that thousands of Burmese soldiers have swept through Karen areas along the Burma-Thailand border, raping women and forcing men to act as porters for the military.

The DKBA--a government-supported faction of Buddhist Karen--has conducted cross-border raids into Thailand, attacking Karen refugee camps, killing and kidnapping Christian Karen National Union leaders and members, killing Thai police and soldiers, and burning two camps in late January 1997.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy monitors restrictions on religious freedom, as well as other human rights problems, and repeatedly raises strong concerns and particular cases of persecution in meetings with government officials. The overall human rights situation in Burma deteriorated significantly in 1996, and, in response to the Government's dismal human rights
record and a continuing pattern of severe repression, the President in April 1997 imposed a ban on new U.S. investment in Burma.

The U.S. Government has also applied a number of other measures against Burma, including suspension of all U.S. assistance, imposition of an arms embargo, and opposition to assistance for Burma from international financial institutions. As a sign of official concern, the United States is represented at the charge level in Burma, rather than by an ambassador. In October 1996, the President imposed a ban on visas for senior Burmese government officials and their families. These sanctions are intended to increase the pressure on the military-led government in Burma to move in the direction of dialogue with the democratic opposition and leaders of ethnic minority groups, as well as to respect fundamental human rights and religious freedom.

**Burundi**

**Current situation:** Burundi has no state religion, and the Government makes no attempt to restrict freedom of worship by adherents of any religion. In the context of an ongoing civil war between the Tutsi-dominated government and military, and largely Hutu insurgents, politically-motivated attacks on churches and church personnel occur with some frequency, including massacres of civilians seeking sanctuary in churches. In September 1996, the Catholic archbishop of Gitega, a Tutsi, was killed in an ambush by persons whom church officials believe were Hutu rebels. In November 1996, government soldiers killed between 200 and 400 Hutu refugees in a church in Murambi province.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Government has encouraged through many means (including embassy demarches, public statements, visits by special envoys, and assistance to negotiations) a cease-fire and all-party talks, as first steps in reaching a political settlement to the conflict. The U.S. Government has also publicly condemned on many occasions the attacks by both the Government and by Hutu rebels on civilians, including churches and church personnel.

**Cameroon**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally does not restrict this right in practice. Religious groups must be approved and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration in order to function legally; there are no known reports of the government refusing registration to any Christian denomination. Many Christian churches of various denominations operate freely throughout the country. Some Christians in rural areas of the north, a predominantly Muslim region, complain of discrimination at the hands of Muslims. Such discrimination as does occur appears to arise from cultural bias, and not government practice. The Catholic Church has on occasion been verbally attacked by the Government for being overly friendly to the political opposition through its forthright criticism of corruption and mismanagement in government circles.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers have emphasized on numerous occasions to government officials at all levels the need for wide-ranging debate of public issues by members of civil society, including churches.
Central African Republic

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and a variety of religious communities, including the Christian community, are active in the country. Religious organizations and missionary groups, including Christian missionaries, are free to proselytize, worship, and construct places of worship. However, the constitution also imposes certain legal conditions, and prohibits religious fundamentalism and intolerance; the 1994 constitutional provision forbidding fundamentalism is widely understood to be aimed at Muslims. All religious groups must register with the government. The Government may impose sanctions on any groups it considers subversive; no sanctions were imposed in 1995 or 1996. A ban imposed by a previous government on Jehovah's Witnesses was lifted by the present Government after its election in 1993.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy encourages and advocates a broad-based democratic system with respect for human rights, including religious freedom.

China

Current situation: The constitution states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief." Nonetheless, the Government of China has sought to restrict all actual religious practice to government-authorized religious organizations and registered places of worship. In practice, this effort has been implemented unevenly and in some areas unauthorized groups have flourished. Since 1980, and particularly in recent years, religious groups--both registered and unregistered--have grown rapidly, however, despite government attempts to assert control over religion. State Council regulations signed in 1994 require all religious groups to register with government religious affairs bureaus and come under the supervision of official religious organizations.

Some religious groups have registered, while others were refused registration, and others have not applied. Many groups have been reluctant to comply due to principled opposition to state control of religion, unwillingness to limit their activities, or refusal to compromise their position on matters such as abortion. They fear adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of members and details about leadership activities, finances, and contacts in China or abroad.

Guided by a central policy directive of October 1996 that launched a national campaign to suppress unauthorized religious groups and social organizations, Chinese authorities in some areas made strong efforts to crack down on the activities of unregistered Catholic and Protestant movements in 1996-1997. They raided and closed several hundred "house church" groups, many with significant memberships, properties, and financial resources. Local authorities used threats, demolition of property, extortion of "fines," interrogation, detention, and reform-through-education sentences in carrying out this campaign. Some leaders of such groups were detained for lengthy investigation, and some were beaten. There were reports that unofficial groups were particularly hard hit in Beijing and the nearby provinces of Henan (where there are rapidly growing numbers of Protestants), and Hebei, a center of unregistered Catholics. At present, four Catholic underground bishops are among the many Christians who remain imprisoned or detained, or whose whereabouts
are unknown. Catholic priests, Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang and Rev. Zen Caijun, were subjected to searches and seizures of religious articles and other property in 1997.

The unregistered Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership far larger than the 4 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church (which does not recognize the authority of the Pope), although no precise figures are available. Government officials estimate that there are about 15 million Protestant worshipers in China; other estimates indicate that approximately 10 million people belong to the official church, while perhaps as many as three to seven times more worship in house churches that are independent of government control.

While officially-registered groups offer a growing range of services to their members and their communities, they are subject to government guidance, and have limits on their doctrinal teachings and activities. Bibles are printed in increasing numbers--three million in 1996, up from one million in 1995--and are distributed by official organizations in cooperation with foreign groups. Social services, including those that benefit from foreign cooperation, are permitted through designated quasi-official charitable organizations, as well as through some individual churches.

Communist Party officials state that party membership and religious belief are incompatible. This places a serious limitation on religious believers, since party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in government and state-owned businesses. This requirement is enforced unevenly; according to a 1995 government survey, 20 percent of Communist Party members engage in some form of religious activity.

The 1994 regulations also codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing by foreigners. However, the regulations allow foreign nationals to preach to foreigners, bring in religious materials for their own use, and preach to Chinese at churches, mosques, and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations.

The Government exercises control over the education of Christian and other religious clergy. According to the Government, there are now 68,000 religious sites in China and 48 religious colleges. Government-sanctioned religious organizations administer more than a dozen Catholic and Protestant seminaries and a limited number of institutes to train scholars of other religions. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and pass an examination on their political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. The Government is permitting growing numbers of religious leaders to go abroad for religious studies and allowing foreign organizations to provide training and materials in China. Unofficial churches, however, have significant problems training clergy. Hebei's underground church seminary was closed down in 1996. The Government bars the Vatican from designating bishops and appoints them directly instead.

Increased government concern about the potential impact of ethnic separatist movements has also led to restriction on the religious freedom of other believers. In Tibet, for example, the authorities tightened restrictions on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, including public expression of reverence for the Dalai Lama. In the predominantly Muslim Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the government tightened control of religious activities in response to a separatist bombing campaign.
A number of mosques have been closed or destroyed, unsanctioned religious classes have been canceled, and some local officials have been dismissed.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States has made freedom of religion a major focus of its human rights policy toward China and has raised the issue frequently in bilateral discussions with Chinese officials. President Clinton raised human rights issues with President Jiang Zemin at the November 1996 Asian Pacific Economic Conference. Vice President Gore discussed U.S. concerns about restrictions on freedom of religion with senior government officials during his March 1997 trip to Beijing. Secretary Albright, during her visit to Beijing in February 1997, discussed U.S. concerns about restrictions on freedom of religion with senior government officials.

In January 1997, a U.S. Government delegation underscored the importance that the United States attaches to fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion, and specifically expressed concern about the persecution of Christians in China. The United States also has raised specific cases of Christians with the Chinese Government, expressing our view that all those incarcerated for the peaceful expression of their religious (or political) views should be released immediately. For example, after Pastor Xu Yongze was arrested in March 1997 and reports circulated of his possible execution, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing raised his case with Chinese officials, who responded by providing information regarding Xu's activities and assurances that he would not be executed.

During Secretary Christopher's November 1996 trip to China, both he and Assistant Secretary Shattuck raised with senior Chinese leaders a range of human rights concerns and called for the release of political prisoners incarcerated for the peaceful expression of their religious, political, or social views. Secretary Christopher also emphasized that our relationship with China will not realize its fullest potential without significant progress in China's human rights situation. In addition, Secretary Christopher extensively discussed these problems with his counterpart, China's Vice Premier Qian Qichen, in their four meetings in April, July, September, and November 1996.

With regard to Tibet, the Administration has strongly encouraged dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama. During their April 1997 meeting with the Dalai Lama, President Clinton and Vice President Gore expressed their continuing concern for the situation of the Tibetan people, including the need to preserve the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists. Secretary Albright and members of her Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad reemphasized these in their meeting with the Dalai Lama.

The United States has continued its efforts to address the issue of freedom of religion in its public diplomacy. The Department of State has issued official statements on the issue of religious persecution on a regular basis.

We have also actively promoted human rights in multilateral fora. We co-sponsored a resolution on China's human rights situation at the UNHRC in Geneva in April that included the issue of religious freedom. We also delivered a statement on religious freedom at the Commission, which contained references to China.
In 1997 the first annual Best Global Practices Award was given to a company recognized for its aggressive advocacy before the business community and the Chinese public in encouraging respect for human rights, including interventions on behalf of religious prisoners.

**Colombia**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for complete religious freedom, and the Government respects this right in practice. Roman Catholic religious instruction is no longer mandatory in state schools, and a Constitutional Court decision in 1994 found unconstitutional any official government reference to religious characterizations of the country. The Government permits proselytizing among the indigenous population, provided that it is welcome and does not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. The law on the freedom of cults provides a mechanism for religions to be recognized as legal entities.

Although overt religious discrimination is rare, the work of many church organizations to promote peace and nonviolent action in the midst of Colombia's internal conflict has led to attacks on church personnel. On May 19, two employees of the Jesuit-run human rights organization, the Center for Investigation and Popular Education, were murdered. Although the Colombian Government launched an immediate investigation, no suspects have so far been identified.

In April 1997, the Ministry of Education ordered the Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia closed, ostensibly because it did not meet educational requirements. However, it is the Mennonite Church's belief that the order was aimed at the 75 draft-age youth enrolled in the Seminary's peacemaker training program, even though the law allows young men pursuing religious education programs to have their military service deferred. The Ministry's order has since been suspended but not rescinded, thereby leaving the status of the students in limbo.

In January 1993, three members of the New Tribes Mission were kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and have yet to be released. Although they are thought to be alive, their precise whereabouts and welfare are unknown.

**U.S. Government actions:** Both the Ambassador and senior officials at the Department of State have persistently called on the Colombian authorities to take more aggressive measures to reduce the high level of impunity for human rights abuses committed by all parties to the internal conflict.

The U.S. Embassy has raised the matter of the Mennonite Biblical seminary with the Colombian government, but has not yet received a response.

In accordance with U.S. policy against negotiating with hostage-takers and thereby encouraging further acts of terrorism, the United States Government has offered the FARC no ransom payments, prisoner exchanges, or any other concessions in the New Tribes Mission case. However, U.S. Government representatives have kept in close touch with the victims’ families and continue to work to gain the cooperation and assistance of the Colombian government, the Costa Rican government, Colombian law enforcement agencies, and numerous non-governmental organizations in urging the FARC to release these hostages.
Comoros

Current situation: An overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. The constitution prohibits discrimination before the law based on religion or religious belief but establishes an ulamas council, which advises the President, Prime Minister, President of the Federal Assembly, the Council of Isles, and the island governors on whether bills, ordinances, decrees, and laws are in conformity with the principles of Islam. The Government permits non-Muslims to practice their faith; Christian missionaries work in local hospitals and schools, however, they are not allowed to proselytize.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has discussed religious freedom with the Government of Comoros in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Current situation: The current regime, newly installed in power after an unexpectedly quick victory over the Mobutu government, has yet to formally establish its religious policies. The Kabila Government has on several occasions declared its commitment to broad principles of tolerance and respect for human rights. Credible accounts of systematic and continuing human rights abuses in eastern Congo, including massacres, appear to be based on ethnic division and intolerance, as well as the intervention of neighboring nations. De facto practices point toward religious tolerance; there were no known instances of religious persecution of Christian churches or church personnel during the march across the former Zaire by the armed forces of the new Government.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Government has made the human rights policies of the new Kabila Government, including religious tolerance, a cornerstone of its relationship with the new regime. The Ambassador, and such visitors as U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson and Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Shattuck, have made clear to the Government that assistance to the Congo will depend on the human rights performance, including religious tolerance, of the new Government.

Croatia

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government respects this right in practice. There is no state religion. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, are the major faiths in Croatia, and there are also smaller Muslim, Protestant and Jewish communities. Croatian Protestants from a number of denominations actively practice and proselytize.

Religion as a reflection of ethnicity, however, is often used to identify non-Croats, particularly Serbs and Bosniaks, who experience discrimination in citizenship, employment, administration of justice, and housing. The close identification of religion with ethnicity sometimes causes religious institutions to become targets of violence. For example, last year two Orthodox churches were
bombed by unknown persons and a Catholic church in Eastern Slavonia was attacked by a Serb mob during its Christmas services, which were attended by a group of ethnic Croats.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Government has repeatedly urged the Government of Croatia to respect the human rights of its citizens, including religious freedom, and to work for a lasting settlement of the regional conflict that ensures that all human rights are respected.

Cuba

Current situation: Although the Government of Cuba has eased the harsher aspects of its repression of religious freedom in recent years, religious persecution continues. In 1996 there were several instances of persecution of Christians in Cuba.

In December 1995, the Cuban Government issued a resolution preventing any Cuban or joint enterprise from selling computers, fax machines, photocopiers, or other equipment to any church. A December 1, 1995 decree signed by Politburo member Jose Ramon Machado Ventura prohibited Christmas trees and decorations in public buildings, except those related to the tourist or foreign commercial sector, and completely prohibited Nativity scenes. The Government ended official recognition of all religious holidays in 1961.

In February 1996, the Union of Communist Youth (UJC) affiliate within the lawyers' collective in the town of Palma Soriano, expelled attorney Cesar Antonio Martinez Melero from his long-standing membership in the UJC because of his active involvement in the Roman Catholic Church. In April 1996 a disciplinary board of the Julio Mella Polytechnic Institute suspended Raul Leyva Ameran's student stipend for 6 months for refusing on religious grounds to participate in a February 27 rally in support of the Government's February 24 shootdown of two civilian U.S. aircraft. Leyva had said that as a Catholic, he "did not support the violent death of anyone and for reasons of conscience (he) could not go to the rally."

Government restrictions on religious activities include limitations on access to the media, establishment of schools, and sponsorship of social activities. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued throughout 1996, with evangelical denominations reporting evictions from, and bulldozing of, houses used for these purposes. In the province of Las Tunas, neighbors of one private house of worship tried to provoke fights with parishioners, blared music during religious services, and tried to pour boiling water through the windows during a religious service. In the western mining town of Moa, a group of evangelical leaders submitted a written appeal to the local Communist Party to stop the harassment of church members and the demolition of houses of worship, and to lift the prohibition on the construction, expansion, or remodeling of churches. The authorities warned religious leaders in Havana that they would impose fines ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 pesos ($500 to $2,500), imprison leaders, and withdraw official recognition from the religious denomination itself, unless the private houses of worship were closed.

The Cuban Government, however, relaxed restrictions on members of Jehovah's Witnesses, whom it has considered "active religious enemies of the revolution" for their refusal to accept obligatory
military service or participate in state organizations. The Government authorized small assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses, the opening of a Havana central office, and the publishing of the group's "Watchtower" magazine and other religious tracts.

The Castro regime authorized a public mass for the first time since 1961 on June 29. This unprecedented outdoor event outside Havana's Cathedral celebrated the 19th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's election as Pope and served to kick off preparations for the Pope's January 1998 visit to Cuba. Jaime Cardinal Ortega celebrated mass for about 4,000 persons, while the regime provided polite yet pervasive security, drinking water, and sanitary facilities, and covered the mass in both televised and print reports.

**U.S. Government actions:** U.S. policy toward Cuba is to promote peaceful, democratic change and respect for human rights, including religious freedom. The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the U.S. Interests Section in Havana is unable to intervene formally regarding cases of religious discrimination and harassment in Cuba. However, the Interests Section reports on such cases, maintains regular contact with religious leaders of all faiths throughout the country, and supports non-governmental organization initiatives that aid religious groups. The U.S. Government continuously marshals international pressure on the Cuban Government to cease its repressive practices.

**Djibouti**

**Current situation:** Islam is the state religion of Djibouti, and virtually the entire population is Sunni Muslim. The Government imposes no particular sanctions on citizens who do not follow Islamic teachings. Foreign clergy and missionaries are permitted to perform charitable works, but proselytizing is discouraged, although not illegal. Various Christian churches operate for the benefit of the expatriate community.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy encourages and advocates a broad-based democratic system with respect for human rights, including the free expression of religious values.

**Egypt**

**Current situation:** Egypt's constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites. For the most part, members of the non-Muslim minorities worship without harassment and maintain links with co-religionists abroad. However, Christians face discrimination based on tradition and some aspects of the law, and there have been instances of persecution of Christians in Egypt in recent years. In addition, Christians have been the target of terrorist groups seeking to overthrow the Government and establish an Islamic state, and terrorists have killed dozens of Christians, as well as hundreds of other citizens, in the past few years, despite government efforts to protect the population.

While technically proselytizing is not a crime, authorities have charged a few Muslim converts to Christianity under provisions of the Penal Code that prohibit the use of religion to "ignite strife, degrade any of the heavenly religions or harm national unity or social peace." At least one
Christian was detained in 1996 on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions and/or inciting secular strife under this law. In other cases authorities have used laws against falsifying documents to prosecute Muslim converts to Christianity, since such persons sometimes attempt to change their names and religious affiliation on their identification cards and other official documentation to reflect their conversion. There were credible reports that in 1996 state security officers in Cairo detained, interrogated, and, in at least two cases, physically abused several converts to Christianity in an effort to obtain information about the identities and activities of other converts. There were also credible reports of at least one similar case in 1995 involving several Christians and converts to Christianity.

An 1856 Ottoman Decree still in force requires non-Muslims to obtain what is now a presidential decree to build or repair a place of worship. Coptic Christians maintain that they have frequently been unable to obtain such authorization, that such permits have been delayed, or that they have been blocked by the security forces from using authorizations that have been issued. The situation improved somewhat in the 1990's, as the Government increased the number of permits issued to Christian communities. However, Egyptian Protestants who are members of evangelical churches reportedly believe that they currently face greater difficulties than Coptic Christians in obtaining permission from the Government to build new churches and repair old ones. Muslim and Christian reformers urge the abolition of the Ottoman decree, but Islamists who oppose the spread of Christianity defend the building restrictions. A local human rights organization brought a legal case during 1996 requesting the abolition of the Ottoman Decree against Copts. The case remains before the court.

In December 1996, the army demolished buildings under construction at a Coptic farm and training center for mentally disabled children. The Cheerful Heart Center had not obtained all necessary building permits, which are strictly controlled due to Egypt's scarce supply of agricultural land.

There were reports of forced conversions of Coptic children to Islam, but human rights groups find it extremely difficult to determine the actual degree of compulsion used, as most cases involve a Coptic girl converting to Islam to marry a Muslim boy. There are credible reports of government harassment of Christian families attempting to regain custody of their daughters, and of the failure of the authorities to uphold the law prohibiting marriages of minors without the approval of the guardian.

The Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood--an illegal political organization--stated in April 1997 that once Egypt became "an Islamic state" Coptic Christians could not serve in the army because in a conflict with a Christian country they "could change their allegiance and become agents of the enemy." This statement aroused a furor among Egyptians, and President Hosni Mubarak, in his Labor Day speech later that month, emphasized that the Copts are "an integral part" of the "national fabric," and "honorable citizens" who enjoy "equal rights and duties."

Both extremists and ordinary citizens have committed acts of violence against churches and Copt-owned businesses. Rumors of church repairs or building without permits occasionally have resulted in anti-Christian rioting by citizens. In one incident in the village of Kafr Demyan, local newspapers
reported that the rioters were incited by Muslim preachers who utilized mosque loudspeakers to call for retaliation against the perceived violations. Copts also report extortion of money by terrorists, who threaten to kill the person or his family if money is not paid. The Government, the media, and senior Muslim clergy have strongly and publicly condemned such acts.

Terrorists continue to attack churches and properties belonging to Christians and to target and kill Christian believers. In February 1997, gunmen attacked a prayer meeting at a Coptic church in the village of Al Fikriya, killing nine young Christians and wounding six. The gunmen killed another Christian while escaping, and the bodies of three others were found in nearby fields 24 hours later. After this incident, the Muslim clergymen in the four highest religious positions in Egypt visited the scene to express their condolences to the families and Christian clergy. The Government condemned the attack and agreed to pay restitution to the victims' families. Police routinely guard Coptic churches; however, no police were on duty at the time of this incident. The Government is investigating the absence of police. In a shoot-out in April, police killed two alleged perpetrators of the attack.

In March 1997, suspected Muslim extremists opened fire in the predominantly Christian village of Ezbet Dawoud, killing 9 Coptic Christians and 4 Muslims, and wounding 15 others. Later that night, gunmen fired at a Cairo-bound train outside the village, killing one person and wounding six others. The Government and the media strongly condemned the attack, and the nation's leading Muslim clergymen also visited the scene. Terrorists killed 22 Coptic Christians in 1996, including a group of 8 in Assiut in February. Terrorists killed at least 30 Christians in 1995 and at least 9 in 1994.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Ambassador and senior embassy officials maintain contacts with the various Christian communities at the highest levels, including Pope Shenouda III, leader of the Coptic Church, and Dr. Samuel Habib, President of the Council of the Protestant Churches of Egypt. Through these contacts and through contacts with human rights organizations, the Embassy monitors reports of religious persecution and discrimination. For example, in April 1997, in response to a request from Religious Freedom International, the Embassy investigated allegations of discrimination against the Kasr Al-Dobara Evangelical Church in an ongoing legal case. Embassy officers, in talking with church officials and attorneys, found that the church was not suffering discrimination. They continue to monitor the case.

The Embassy also maintains a continuous dialogue with the Government of Egypt on all human rights issues. Embassy actions regarding individual human rights cases are part of this ongoing dialogue. The U.S. Government publicly and firmly condemned the killings of Coptic Christians by terrorists.

**Equatorial Guinea**

**Current situation:** The Government generally respects freedom of religion. There is no state religion, and the Government does not discriminate against any faith. Religious organizations must be formally recognized by the Ministry of Justice and Religion before they can pursue their activities. Missionaries in 1996 reported a significant easing of government pressure on their
activities during the year. The Government does restrict the freedom of expression of Catholic clergy; there were several incidents in 1996 involving the arrest, beating, and expulsion from parishes of priests accused of "political sermons."

U.S. Government actions: There is no resident U.S. Ambassador in Equatorial Guinea. The U.S. Embassy in neighboring Cameroon has encouraged a general liberalization of Equatorial-Guinean political culture, involving greater respect for the public expression of alternate points of view, including views of church leaders.

**Eritrea**

Current situation: A draft constitution provides for the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice. However the Government has banned religious organizations from any involvement in politics, and has issued specific guidelines regarding the role of religious organizations, stating that development, politics, and public administration are the sole responsibility of government and the people. These guidelines also govern relations between religious organizations and foreign sponsors.

Government action against Jehovah's Witnesses occurs, as the Government considers their refusal to participate in national service or vote in national referenda a collective shirking of civic duty. The sanctions consist of revocation of business licenses, and dismissal of civil servants who are Jehovah's Witnesses, and also denial of identification cards, passports, and government housing.


**Estonia**

Current situation: The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. The 1993 Law on Churches and Religious Organizations requires all religious organizations to have at least 12 members and to be registered with the Interior Ministry and the Board of Religion. Leaders of religious organizations must be citizens with at least 5 years' residence in Estonia.

People of varying ethnic backgrounds profess Orthodoxy, including communities of Russian Old Believers who found refuge in Estonia in the 17th century. In 1993, the synod of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) in exile, independent since 1919, subordinate to Constantinople since 1923, and exiled under the Soviet occupation, re-registered as the legal continuation of the pre-war EAOC; it has subsequently been recognized by Tallinn courts as the heir to the EAOC name and properties. This claim is disputed by the Russian Orthodox Church supported by the Patriarch in Moscow, which has sought to register under the EAOC name and has refused to register under any other name. During 1996 representatives of the Moscow and Constantinople Patriarchates formed a joint commission to resolve the question. The dispute, which centers on property issues, is the subject of ongoing discussions. The Government has taken a hands
off approach to the issue, but has assured parishes aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church that they may continue to worship unimpeded. Free worship has occurred in practice.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy monitors the registration process for discrimination against certain religious groups.

**Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right of conversion, and freedom of worship exists in practice. Accurate information on the complex relationships among Ethiopia's religious groups is difficult to obtain, especially because religious differences are often related to ethnic distinctions. Religious tensions between Christians and Muslims, particularly in certain regions (most notably the Oromiya and Somali regions) persist, and anti-Christian sentiment is sometimes fueled by historical perceptions of Christians as elite. According to reports from non-governmental organizations, tension at the local level between and among Christians and Muslims has led to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and in some cases, violence.

Tension--and some incidents of harassment--also occur among Christian groups, for example, between Orthodox Christians and Protestants and "newly arrived" Pentecostals. Such problems reportedly stem to a considerable degree from cultural differences, rather than religious intolerance per se. Pentecostals reportedly have difficulty gaining acceptance in local communities because they are fairly new in Ethiopia and are extremely active in seeking converts. In one incident in early 1997, there was a clash between some Orthodox Christians and a group of Pentecostals and Evangelicals who had planned a peaceful rally. The authorities jailed an Orthodox priest for one night for inciting violence.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Ambassador has traveled throughout Ethiopia and has met with leaders of the various religious traditions. He has discussed societal religious tension with senior Ethiopian officials. The problem of religious persecution is addressed in the overall context of the protection of human rights, though government officials and some independent observers insist that there is a general atmosphere of religious harmony throughout Ethiopian society.

**France**

**Current situation:** The law provides for separation of church and state, and the Government respects this provision in practice. The State subsidizes private schools, including those that are church-affiliated. Central or local governments also own and provide upkeep for other religious buildings constructed before 1905, the date of the law separating church and state. Cultural associations with religious affiliations may also qualify for government subsidies. Contrary to practice in the rest of France, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic religions in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status. Adherents of these four religions may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their church in a system the central Government administers.
A Parliamentary Commission on Sects identified 172 groups as sects, including Jehovah's Witnesses, which was categorized as a "criminal sect" for its prohibition against blood transfusions. The Commission's Vice President has stated that certain elements characterize sect behavior, including the mental manipulation of members especially as pertains to money and sex, and the cultivation of an anti-social mentality that leads to rupture with the family. The Commission is studying legislative proposals to regulate sect activity without intruding upon individual liberties.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Government is following the work of the Parliamentary Commission on Sects. The United States would be concerned if individuals were to be denied rights on the basis of their belief or mere affiliation with a certain group, rather than on the basis of illegal acts.

Germany

Current situation: The Basic Law provides for religious freedom, and the Government broadly respects this right in practice. Numerous religious groups are active in Germany; many organizations, including many Christian groups, enjoy tax-exempt status. Most of the population belongs to the Catholic or Lutheran churches. These denominations and the Jewish community hold a special legal status as corporate bodies under public law, giving them, for example, the right to participate in a state-administered church tax system. State governments subsidize church-affiliated schools and provide religious instruction in schools and universities for those belonging to the Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish faith. Groups of religious character, including some Christian groups, which are not granted special legal status, do not benefit from the privileges granted by the State.

Recently, a federal administration court in Berlin denied Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a "public body" on the grounds that the church did not offer the "indispensable loyalty" towards the State, because, for example, it refused to acknowledge public elections. Jehovah's Witnesses are appealing this ruling in the Constitutional Court. Scientologists, including American citizens, have reported discrimination and harassment in Germany. In June 1997, German authorities placed the Church of Scientology under observation for one year, a decision Scientologists indicated they would appeal.

In some German state governments and state/local-level church organizations, sect observers work within some political, administrative, and church structures to "educate" the public and other officials about how to recognize members of sects. A German Parliamentary "Commission of Inquiry on So-Called Psychogroups and Sects" is preparing a report on sects and the potential dangers they may pose to society and to individuals. One Christian Charismatic Church led by an American pastor reported that it had been subjected over several years to vandalism, threats of violence, and public harassment or scrutiny by sect commissioners. The church is challenging a 1995 ruling by authorities in Cologne, who revoked its tax exempt status on the grounds that it was not a charitable organization and did not contribute to the cultural, religious, or spiritual value of German society.
In May and June 1997, five Catholic and Protestant churches in northern Germany were the targets of graffiti and arson attacks. Government officials have condemned these acts, arrests have been made in connection with some of the attacks, and investigations are continuing.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Government has expressed concern to the German Government about efforts to monitor religious organizations. The U.S. Government also has told the German Government that it would be concerned if persons were placed under observation or denied rights on the basis of mere membership in a group, rather than suspicion of illegal acts by individuals.

**Greece**

**Current situation:** The constitution establishes the Greek Orthodox Church as the prevailing religion, but it prohibits discrimination against adherents of other religions. The Greek Orthodox Church wields significant influence though its relationship with the Ministry of Education and Religion. Religious training is mandatory in public schools for Greek Orthodox pupils. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement. However, some teachers suspended members of Jehovah's Witnesses for not participating in school national day parades. The constitution limits religious practice by prohibiting proselytizing; four members of Jehovah's Witnesses were harassed by the authorities, who arrested and held them for several hours at police headquarters but subsequently released them without pressing charges. Several cases involving proselytizing were pending before the European Court of Human Rights at the end of 1996.

Non-Orthodox religious groups must be recognized as a "known religion" before they can obtain a "house of prayer" permit necessary to hold services. There is no formal mechanism for newly arrived religious groups to apply for the prerequisite government recognition. Such groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, cannot obtain permits to operate a house of prayer without first having the status of a "known religion," but this status can only be obtained if the Greek Government brings legal action against the group and a court deems the group's beliefs worthy of recognition as a religion. In practice, this means that non-Orthodox religious groups exist in a legal twilight zone until they come into conflict with the Greek Government over house of prayer permits, their tax-exempt status, or conscientious objection; only then, and only if the group wins the case, is recognition as a religion granted.

"House of prayer" permits are submitted to the Ministry of Education and Religion, which bases its decision on the perceived merit of a group's beliefs, as well as the advisory opinion of the Orthodox bishop. Obtaining this permit can be problematic for religious groups that have been present in Greece for centuries, such as Roman Catholics; the process is even more onerous for recently-arrived groups. In recent years, such permission has been granted to some groups only after long delays, and withheld altogether from other denominations. Two members of Jehovah's Witnesses were charged in February with the illegal use of a house of prayer in Komotini.

Traditionally, ministers of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses were not granted the exemption from military service accorded under the law to clergy of "known religions," and thus served prison sentences for refusing military service. Since 1990-1991, the Council of State, the highest court dealing with civil and administrative matters (and whose opinions are binding on the
Government), has ruled that Jehovah's Witnesses were a "known religion" and has ordered the release of ministers who had refused induction. However, the recruiting service of the armed forces regarded these rulings as applying only to individual appellants, rather than as binding precedents for subsequent instances in which ministers of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses were called up. It thus continued to rely, in the first instance, on the opinion of the Ministry of Education and Religion, which in turn accepted the view of the Greek Orthodox Church, that Jehovah's Witnesses are not a "known religion." As a consequence, for the past few years, ministers of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses have been called up for military service and prosecuted for refusal to serve; only after conviction could they appeal to the Council of State.

In September 1996, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of four members of Jehovah's Witnesses who had been found guilty by the Supreme Court in 1991 of illegally operating a house of prayer. The Court found that the house of prayer authorization procedure allowed the Government to limit the exercise of religious freedom by members of non-Orthodox religions, and was therefore contrary to Article 9 of the European convention on human rights. The Government nevertheless denied after the verdict that any restrictions were imposed.

In May 1996, an appeals court considering the case of former Greek Orthodox priest Nikodomos Tsarknias overturned three of his previous convictions for "pretense of authority." Human rights monitors noted that the language of the court's decision implied recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. A permit request for construction of a Macedonian Orthodox Church is pending with the Ministry of Education and Religion.

In 1993 the Greek Government granted recognition as a club to the Church of Greek Christians, a Christian nondenominational group. In the years since, its members and leaders on the island of Crete have come under attack by members of the Orthodox Church and the media, who have accused club members of practicing black magic and club leaders of stealing money. The Minister of Education ordered an investigation of the group on charges that it was proselytizing among children in public schools. Two teachers were removed from their jobs and a principal in a public school was told that he would be removed from his job if he did not cross himself in the manner that the Orthodox religion demands.

The Greek Parliament this year created several new taxes on religious groups, one of which appears to hit non-orthodox religious groups much harder than the Greek Orthodox Church. The first law, passed in February 1997, related to the "abolition of tax exemptions." The second law, passed in May 1997, dealt with taxes on "large real estate holdings." These taxes pertain to property and the income of institutions, such as schools and hospitals, which previously had been considered non-profit and tax-exempt. Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Jewish community have protested these laws in various European fora and have raised their concerns with U.S. Government officials.

U.S. Government actions: U.S. Embassy officials meet frequently with representatives of Christian groups that have experienced difficulties in Greece to discuss their concerns about religious freedom. U.S. officials also meet with Greek Government officials to discuss these matters. U.S. officials have attended the trials of Christian church adherents charged with offenses
that relate to religious practice, and have used multilateral fora to express concerns about the treatment of minority religious groups in Greece.

India

**Current situation:** The State is secular. The constitution provides for religious freedom, and this right is respected in practice. There is no national law to bar proselytizing by Indian Christians, but the Government has refused since the mid-1960s to admit new resident foreign missionaries. Missionaries who arrive now do so on tourist visas and stay for short periods only. As of 1993, there were more than 1,900 registered foreign Christian missionaries.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of India, including respect for human rights.

Indonesia

**Current situation:** The Indonesian constitution provides for religious freedom and belief in one Supreme God. The Government recognizes Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and permits the practice of the mystical, traditional beliefs of "Aliran Kepercayaan." There are 170 million Muslims making Indonesia the largest Muslim Country. There are also 12 million Protestants and 6 million Catholics. However, the practice and teachings of all recognized religions are generally respected, and the Government actively promotes mutual tolerance among them. Non-Muslims hold positions of importance in the military, the government, and in the business sector.

There are some restrictions on religious freedom, including a ban on atheism and some restrictions on the activities of unrecognized religions. The Government has also banned some religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

The law allows conversions between faiths, and such conversions occur. The Government views proselytizing by recognized religions in areas heavily dominated by another recognized religion as potentially disruptive and discourages it. Foreign missionary activities are relatively unimpeded, although in East Timor and occasionally elsewhere missionaries have experienced difficulties and delays in renewing residence permits, and visas allowing the entrance of new foreign clergy are sometimes difficult to obtain. Laws and decrees from the 1970's limit the number of years that foreign missionaries can spend in Indonesia, with some extensions granted in remote areas like Irian Jaya.

There were several instances of religion-related mob violence during 1996. In July several Christian churches were burned in Surabaya. On October 10, rioters destroyed 24 churches and a Buddhist temple on the East Java coast, to protest the leniency of a sentence given to a Muslim by an Indonesian judge for slandering Islam. In the course of the riots a Protestant minister, his wife and child, and a church worker were burned to death.
After the riots the Government and local religious leaders took a number of actions. Fifty individuals were arrested, of whom five were tried and sentenced to 1 to 5 months in prison. Abdurahman Wahid, the chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)--Indonesia's largest Islamic organization--took moral responsibility for the riots, because many of the rioters were NU members. The churches destroyed in the October riots are being rebuilt with financial assistance from the provincial government. Through the efforts of Abdurahman Wahid, confidence and cooperation between these Christian and Muslim communities has been restored and become stronger.

In addition, in response to a riot in Situbondo, eight mass national student and youth organizations founded the Nationality Forum for Indonesian Youth (FKPI), an organization that brings together Hindu, Islamic, Protestant, and Catholic youth groups. The goals of the forum are to create a new spirit of nationality, to create a place for the expression of youth aspirations, and to provide a forum for cooperation between religious groups and for communication to the grass roots level to prevent further unrest.

The reported police beating of Islamic teachers in December 1996, along with the false rumor that one of the teachers had been killed, apparently was the cause of serious rioting in Tasikmalaya, West Java, which involved thousands of people. Although sparked by anger over police abuse, the rioting reportedly targeted businesses, factories, and shops, including those owned by members of the Chinese community, churches, and police offices. In September 1996, a group of young people burned a Catholic church in east Jakarta. The group was apparently Muslim, and was seeking to eliminate non-Muslim influences in the area.

The proportion of Catholics in East Timor is much higher today than it was when it was a Portuguese colony. The number of churches has increased substantially as well. In previous years, Bishop Belo and other Catholics have expressed concern that the government may be attempting to Islamize in East Timor through promoting migration of Muslim Indonesians from other islands. In August 1996, in Viqueque, East Timorese demonstrated against government-sponsored Muslim migrants to the area, and burned a number of shops owned by these migrants. In June, also in East Timor, the desecration of either a picture or statue of the Virgin Mary in Baucau sparked rioting on the part of the Catholic East Timorese. This led to numerous arrests and at least one serious injury. In October, President Soeharto dedicated a 90-foot statue of Christ in Dili.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy engages the Government of Indonesia on a wide range of human rights issues and concerns. During his March 1997 trip to Indonesia, Assistant Secretary Shattuck raised the issue of tension between groups of different religious faiths, and expressed concern about violent incidents on Java, such as the Situbondo riot. In response, Indonesian officials emphasized that they were working to promote better relations between members of different religions. In 1997 the U.S. co-sponsored a UNHRC resolution concerning the human rights situation on East Timor.
Current situation: The Iranian constitution declares that Islam is the "official religion" of Iran and that "the sect followed is Ja'fari Shi'ism." The Government restricts freedom of religion both for other Muslim sects and other religious minorities, including Christians. The constitution states that other Islamic denominations "shall enjoy complete respect," and also recognizes Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Members of these religions elect representatives to reserved parliamentary seats. They may practice their religion and instruct their children, but the Government interferes with the administration of their schools and harassment by government officials is common. The law also stipulates penalties for government workers who do not observe "Islamic principles and rules."

Non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims. Muslims who convert to another faith are considered apostates and may be subject to the death penalty. Four Baha'is remain in prison under death sentences, convicted on charges of apostasy in 1996. There have been no reports in recent years of Christians convicted on apostasy charges.

Official oppression of evangelical Christians increased in 1996. In early July 1996, a Muslim convert to Christianity, Shahram Sepehri-Fard, was arrested on charges of having "sensitive information." He has been denied visitors since shortly after his arrest, and his condition is unknown. In late September 1996, another Muslim convert to evangelical Christianity, Pastor Mohammed Yussefi (also known as Ravanbaksh), was found dead in a public park. He is widely believed to have been murdered by Iranian authorities. Yussefi had been imprisoned by the Government on several occasions prior to his death. Three members of an opposition movement, Mojahadin-e-Khaleq (MEK), Farohnaz Anami, Betoul Vaferi Kalateh, and Maryam Shahbazpoor, are currently in prison for the 1994 murder of Reverend Tatavous Michaelian, an evangelical Protestant pastor. The three women claim that two other Christian pastors murdered in 1994, Reverend Mehdi Dibaj and Reverend Haik Hovsepian Mehr, were also killed by the MEK. However, many observers believe that it is more likely that the Government is responsible for these deaths.

In January 1997, two Christian evangelists, Daniel Baumann and Stuart Timm, were arrested and detained under suspicion of espionage, a charge which is often levied against persons who proselytize in Iran. Baumann is a Swiss/American dual national and Timm holds South African citizenship. Both eventually were released without having been charged.

U.S. Government actions: The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran and is therefore unable to directly monitor the serious problems of religious persecution that exist in the country.

In coordination with the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, the United States worked to obtain the release of Daniel Baumann, who was freed in March. Stuart Timm was released in February.

In 1996 the U.S. Government publicly condemned Iran's persecution of Christians, Baha'is, and other religious minorities on a number of occasions at international fora, in policy statements, and through radio broadcasts.
At the UNHRC, the UNGA, and the International Labor Organization, the United States strongly supported resolutions condemning human rights violations in Iran, including the persecution of Christians. The United States also called for extending the mandates of the U.N. Special Representative for Iran, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, each of whom visited Iran in 1995 to ascertain details about conditions there. The U.N. Special Representative on Iran is awaiting an invitation from the Government and has been unable to visit the country.

The State Department spokesman has issued statements on the mistreatment of Baha'is and Christians in Iran and several Voice of America editorials have focused on this problem.

***Iraq***

**Current situation:** The provisional constitution of 1968 states that "Islam is the religion of the State," but the Government of Iraq severely limits freedom of religion. Ethnic and religious communities, including the majority Shi'a population and the Kurds in northern Iraq, not associated with the ruling clique have suffered massive repression for decades.

The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Iraq and others report that the Iraqi Government has engaged in various abuses against the country's 350,000 Assyrian Christians. Most Assyrians traditionally live in the northern governorates, and the Government often has suspected them of "collaborating" with Kurds. Assyrians are an ethnic group as well as a Christian community. They speak a distinct language--Syriac--which is banned de facto in public. The U.N. Special Rapporteur reported continued discrimination and persecution against Assyrians throughout 1996. Other sources also report that the Government continued in 1996 to harass and kill Assyrian Christians throughout the country, using forced relocations, terror, and artillery bombardments.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus does not have bilateral channels in which to raise human rights issues. However, the United States has vigorously led the international community's condemnation of human rights violations in Iraq. At the UNGA, the U.S. led successful efforts to adopt a resolution condemning Iraq's human rights record. The U.S. Government has also strongly supported the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Iraq and assisted his staff in their interviews of refugees from northern Iraq, including Assyrian Christians, who were in Guam awaiting resettlement in the United States.

***Israel***

**Current situation:** The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right. The Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities each have legal authority over their members in matters of marriage and divorce, although Christians have the choice of religious or civil courts in some matters. In civic areas where religion is a determining criterion, such as the religious courts and centers of education, non-Jewish institutions receive less state support than their Jewish counterparts.
The status of a number of Christian organizations with representation in Israel has heretofore been defined by a collection of ad hoc arrangements with various government agencies. Several of these organizations are negotiating with the Government in an attempt to formalize their status. Attempts to establish meaningful negotiations are ongoing.

Missionaries are allowed to proselytize, although Mormons are specifically prohibited from doing so by mutual agreement between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Government. A 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits anyone from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion.

In the spring of 1997, a private member's bill was introduced in the Israeli Knesset (parliament) to restrict proselytizing, apparently in reaction to an evangelical Christian group's mass mailing of brochures to thousands of Israelis. If passed in its current form, this bill would amend the current anti-proselytization law, and prohibit the production, import, or dissemination of religious materials "in which there is an inducement to religious conversion," and would provide for confiscation of the materials and one-year prison sentence.

Local civil rights activists and legal scholars strongly oppose the bill, which they state contravenes freedom of expression and freedom of religion provided for in Israel's basic laws. They note that the bill's sweeping language theoretically could prohibit even the ownership of a New Testament. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has publicly stated his government's opposition to the bill, which is still under preliminary consideration in the Knesset.

The small community of Jehovah's Witnesses has faced harassment and occasional violent attacks by private citizens opposed to religious proselytization. On March 8, 1997, a mob of over 250 Haredim (ultra-conservative Orthodox Jews) attacked the Lod meeting hall, broke into the building, destroyed the interior, and burned religious literature, books, and furnishings. The police stated that they were notified by bystanders too late to intervene.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses have reported being followed, and have also reported death threats. Police have occasionally evinced indifference to complaints, sometimes alleging that members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize without a permit (although there is no requirement or provision under Israeli law for such a permit). Police have warned that they would act to uphold the law if there was any further interference with anyone's right to worship.

U.S. Government actions: In March, after the attack on the Lod meeting hall, the U.S. Embassy raised the issue of police protection for Jehovah's Witnesses with the head of the Foreign Liaison Division of the Israeli National Police. The head of the division assured the Embassy that police patrols would be stepped up while the facility was being rebuilt, and that the police had already advised communities of Jehovah's Witnesses to notify them of any planned meetings so that adequate security could be provided. The Embassy inquired whether the Lod police had made any arrests or had filed charges against suspected perpetrators of the March 8 attack on the Lod meeting hall, and was informed that individuals had been detained, questioned, and warned, but that no charges had been brought. The Embassy emphasized that while assurances of police protection in the future for Jehovah's Witnesses were welcome, since the identity of those involved in the
March 8 attack was apparently known, we expected active prosecution of those who had violated the law.

**Jordan**

**Current situation:** Jordan's constitution designates Islam as the state religion, but also prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for "personal freedom." The Government does not interfere with public worship by Jordan's Christian minority.

The Government does not officially recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the United Pentecostal Church, the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, but it allows them to conduct their activities without interference. Other, more established religious groups, which include Muslims, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Syriacs, and Armenian Orthodox, require official government recognition in order to register property in the name of the organization, but members may practice their religion without government recognition. The law prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing. Muslims who convert to other faiths report social and government discrimination. In general, however, Christians do not suffer discrimination.

Christians hold cabinet and other government positions and are represented in the media and academia in numbers greater than their proportion in the overall population. Of the 80 seats in the lower house of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians.

Christian children in public schools are not required to participate in Islamic religious instruction. The Government announced in October 1996 a plan to teach Christianity as a religion in Jordan's public schools, but there has been no official announcement on when the plan is to be implemented.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States maintains an ongoing dialogue with Jordan and provides assistance on human rights issues.

**Kazakstan**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and various denominations worship without government interference. However, the constitution also requires that the appointment by foreign religious centers of the heads of religious associations must be carried out "in coordination with the Government," as must the activities of foreign religious associations. In practice the Government does not interfere with the appointment of religious leaders. Foreign missionaries have complained of harassment by low-level government officials, but the extent of the problem is unknown. In 1996 the government-controlled television complained about conversions to foreign religions and proposed stopping missionaries from preaching "Christianity and Krishna ideas on our soil." However, no action has been taken against missionaries.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Kazakstan, including respect for human rights.
Kenya


U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy and the State Department have continued to advocate a broad-based democratic system with respect for human rights, including the free expression of religious values.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Current situation: The North Korean Government continues to firmly discourage all organized religious activity except that which serves the interests of the State. As late as the early 1980's, foreign visitors to North Korea were told that there were no churches in the country. However, in recent years, the regime has facilitated the formation of several government-sponsored religious organizations. These serve as interlocutors with foreign church groups and international aid organizations. Some foreigners who have met with representatives of these organizations are convinced that they are sincere believers; others claim that they appeared to know little about religious dogma, liturgy, or teaching.

Three Christian churches--two Protestant and one Catholic--have been opened since 1988 in Pyongyang. These appear to be the only active Christian churches in the country. Many visitors say that church activity appears staged. Foreign Christians who have attempted to attend services at these churches without making prior arrangements with the authorities report finding them locked and unattended, even on Easter Sunday. There are reportedly no Catholic priests resident in the country to celebrate mass and administer the sacraments.

The North Korean Government claims that there are 10,000 Christians who worship in 500 "house churches," and that the Chondogyo Young Friends Party, a government-sponsored group based on a native Korean religious movement, is still in existence. The authorities have told foreign visitors that one Protestant seminary exists, accepting six to nine pupils every three years.

U.S. Government actions: The United States does not maintain diplomatic relations with North Korea, and thus can not formally intervene with the North Korean Government regarding religious persecution. However, the U.S. Government has publicly condemned religious persecution in North Korea at international fora and in public statements.
Kuwait

Current situation: Islam is the state religion of Kuwait. The constitution states that Islamic law (or Shari'a), is "a main source of legislation." The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and there are several legally recognized expatriate congregations and churches, including a Catholic diocese and several Protestant churches. The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing among Muslims; however, they may serve expatriate congregations. The law prohibits religious education for religions other than Islam, although this law does not appear to be rigidly enforced.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Ambassador and his staff closely monitor freedom of religion in Kuwait and raise U.S. concerns with the Kuwaiti Government. The U.S. Government made a significant effort in the case of Qambar "Robert" Hussein, a Kuwaiti citizen who converted to Christianity and in May 1996 was found by a Kuwaiti court to be an "apostate." Robert Hussein was a Shi'a Muslim before his conversion. A group of private Kuwaiti citizens brought Hussein before a Shi'a family law court, challenging his inheritance and child custody rights. The Government of Kuwait did not incarcerate Hussein or press charges against him. The family law court denied Hussein any rights on the two issues of child custody and inheritance, and the presiding judge, in handing down his decision, referred to a traditional Koranic law that states that "the Imam should kill the Muslim who commits apostasy." Although that comment was not part of the formal sentence, it had the potential to incite others to harm Hussein.

The U.S. Ambassador discussed Hussein's welfare with senior Kuwaiti officials, members of Parliament, and influential figures in Kuwaiti society. He urged the Government of Kuwait to affirm publicly that Hussein's civil rights and his safety would be protected. Subsequently, an official Kuwaiti statement that Hussein's rights and person are protected under law appeared in the Kuwaiti press. The Kuwaiti Government's legal adviser was quoted in the press as saying that "the Government guarantees his (Robert Hussein's) personal safety and his right to live."

Robert Hussein received a nonimmigrant visa from our Embassy in Kuwait and traveled to the United States in August 1996. He reportedly returned to Kuwait in January 1997, and press reports indicate that he converted back to Islam after his return.

Kyrgyz Republic

Current situation: All religious organizations must register with the State Commission on Religious Affairs. Groups wishing to own property must register with the Justice Ministry. The constitution provides for freedom of religion but the Government does not always protect this right in practice. A Baptist congregation in Naryn oblast, an ethnic Kyrgyz area, has been denied registration and harassed by police. Ethnic groups that are traditionally Christian can practice their religion without interference, but the conversion of ethnic Kyrgyz from Islam to Christianity remains controversial.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has urged senior Kyrgyz officials to stop the harassment of the Baptists in Naryn.
Laos

Current situation: Although the Laotian constitution contains provisions for religious freedom, in practice, the Government continues to restrict freedom of religion, especially for some Christian denominations. Buddhists are the dominant majority among religious adherents.

Links with co-religionists and religious associations in other countries require government approval. Although the Government permits foreign non-governmental organizations with religious affiliations to work in the country, it prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. The Government also restricts the import of foreign religious publications and artifacts.

The enforcement of these regulations varies by province. For example, the Catholic Church is unable to operate in the highlands and much of the north, but Catholics can openly attend churches and chapels in central and southern Laos. Several Protestant denominations operate more than 100 churches throughout the country. There continued to be credible reports during 1996 that local authorities detained some clergy for allegedly criticizing other religions and harassed, arrested, and jailed other religiously active clergy. The persistence of such reports underscores the continuing suspicion on the part of authorities toward some parts of the Lao Christian community, and authorities' suspicion that the Lao Christian community may be associated with "foreign influences." There were also unconfirmed reports that Lao Christians were sometimes barred from the People's Revolutionary Party or from government employment. By comparison, the Government openly encourages Buddhism and supports Buddhist organizations.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has raised the issue of religious freedom with the Government of Laos in the overall context of the protection of human rights. The Embassy maintains a dialogue with the Government on a wide range of human rights issues, including religious freedom.

Latvia

Current situation: The Constitutional Law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations specifies that religious organizations can enjoy certain rights and privileges only if they register. Under this law, the Justice Ministry has registered over 800 religious congregations, including Mormons, whose previous lack of official registration had created difficulties in obtaining visas and residence status. The only group denied registration was Jehovah's Witnesses.

Foreign evangelists and missionaries are permitted to hold meetings and proselytize, but the law stipulates that only religious organizations in Latvia may invite them to carry out such activities. After the widely reported death of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, whose religious beliefs affected her choice of medical treatment, President Guntis Ulmanis sent a letter to the Saeima (parliament) asking lawmakers to specify the rights and responsibilities of unregistered religious organizations. He also suggested that the Saeima supplement the Criminal Code "with norms about inflicting physical or psychological damage on a person and about threatening a person's
legal rights as a result of activities by a religious organization." The Saeima Human Rights and Legal Committees subsequently began considering a draft amendment to the Administrative Code that would have prescribed fines for undefined "activities" by unregistered religious organizations. The National Human Rights Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that the provisions would violate international obligations in the area of religious freedom. The Saeima took no final action on this matter.

In July 1996, the Saeima adopted amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations, one of which reduced the number of persons necessary to seek registration of a religious group from a minimum of 25 citizens to 10 persons residing permanently in Latvia. Another amendment stipulated that religious education may be provided to students in public schools on a voluntary basis only by representatives of Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Old Believer, Baptist, and Orthodox religious organizations. Students at state-supported national minority schools may also receive education in the religion "characteristic of the national minority." Other denominations may provide religious education, but may not do so in state-funded schools.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has actively supported the efforts of Mormons and other U.S. missionaries to obtain Latvian residency permits. These efforts have produced positive results, as most missionaries have resolved their visa problems with Latvia's Citizen and Immigration Department.

The U.S. Embassy has also facilitated meetings between senior Latvian Government officials and representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses. Meetings held in October 1996 in the aftermath of the death of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses enabled representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses to present their case directly to the appropriate officials of the Latvian Government. They also provided the U.S. Government with another opportunity to express its strong views about freedom of religion, opposition to discriminatory measures against Jehovah's Witnesses, and the important role of continuing dialogue in addressing respective concerns.

U.S. Government officials have used multilateral fora to express concerns about restrictions that apply in Latvia to religious education by non-traditional religious groups, including some Christian religious organizations, in public schools.

**Lebanon**

Current situation: The Lebanese constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. However, discrimination based on religion is built into the system of government. The President is by tradition a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shi'a Muslim. The Parliament consists of 128 deputies, equally divided between Christian and Muslim representatives.

The amended Constitution of 1990 embraces the principle of abolishing religious affiliation as a criterion for filling all government positions, but few practical steps have been taken to accomplish this, with the exception of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which, through
universal conscription and an emphasis on professionalism, has significantly reduced religious sectarianism within its ranks.

The 1975-1990 civil war had sectarian components, and Syrian and Israeli troops, as well as militias and armed Palestinian factions, remain in control of parts of Lebanon.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy in Beirut works with all of Lebanon's 18 recognized religious factions or confessions and has supported the development of a non-confessional LAF.

**Lithuania**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government usually respects this provision in practice. The Law on Religious Communities and Associations was passed in October 1995. It grants religious communities, associations, and centers property rights to prayer houses, homes, and other buildings, and permits construction necessary for their activities. Article 5 of this law mentions nine religious communities that have been declared "traditional" by the law and therefore are eligible for governmental assistance: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformers, Orthodox, Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites. There are no restrictions on the activities of other religious communities.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy monitors the registration process for discrimination against certain religious groups.

**Malaysia**

**Current situation:** Islam is the official religion. Religious minorities, which include large Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Christian communities, generally are permitted to worship freely but are subject to some restrictions. There continued to be allegations that some state governments are slow in approving building permits for non-Muslim places of worship or land for cemeteries for non-Muslims.

The Government discourages the circulation of a popular Malay-language translation of the Bible. Some states have laws prohibiting the use of Malay-language religious terms by Christians, but the authorities do not actively enforce them.

The Government permits but discourages conversion to religions other than Islam. Some states have long proscribed by law proselytizing of Muslims, and other parts of the country strongly discourage it as well. In a March 1990 decision, the Supreme Court upheld the primacy of the constitution over inconsistent state laws by ruling that parents have the right to determine the religion of their minor children under the age of 18. The decision eased fears in the non-Muslim community over state laws that in religious conversion cases set the age of majority at puberty based on Islamic law.

Maldives

Current situation: Islam is the state religion and all citizens are required to be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. However, foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion if they do so privately. Conversion from Islam may result in loss of citizenship, but this law has never been applied in practice.

U.S. Government actions: The United States has diplomatic relations with Maldives but does not maintain an Embassy in Male.

Mauritania

Current situation: Under its 1991 constitution, Mauritania is an Islamic republic, with Islam established as the religion of the State and its people. The vast majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims. The Government prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims. Christian churches exist in several cities for the benefit of the tiny Christian community. Expatriate Christians and citizens of Christian birth practice their religion freely. Authorities have on occasion detained and harassed individuals who have passed on Christian religious materials to Muslim citizens.

Slavery has been officially abolished in Mauritania three times, most recently in 1980. Nevertheless, there are many individuals (including Christians, animists, and Muslims) who continue to live in conditions of paid or unpaid servitude, and many persons still consider themselves to be slaves.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy encourages and advocates a broad-based democratic system with respect for human rights, including the free expression of religious values.

Mexico

Current situation: The constitution provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice. The Federal Government's Office of Religious Affairs actively promotes religious tolerance and held symposiums in July 1996 in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas emphasizing the constitutional right of freedom of religion. However, local authorities sometimes infringed on this right. In the highlands of Chiapas and other indigenous areas, traditional leaders sometimes acquiesced in, or actually ordered, the expulsion of Protestants belonging primarily to evangelical groups. In many cases such expulsions involved the burning of homes and crops, beatings, and, occasionally, killings.

In San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, where local authorities have expelled an estimated 30,000 evangelicals over the past 30 years, the evangelicals and the local authorities reached a truce in December 1995. Since that time, there have been no further expulsions of evangelicals from San Juan Chamula. The local authorities agreed that children of the evangelicals would be allowed to
return to public school, from which they had been excluded for three years. However, in September 1996 the children of evangelicals were once again excluded, and in retaliation, evangelical groups occupied these schools. By October the situation for the most part had been resolved, and by the end of 1996 the evangelicals' children were attending public school in all but one community, Arvenza II, where the parents chose to keep their children at home.

In July 1996, the evangelicals began constructing a temple in the community of Arvenza I. Following protests by the local authorities, and in order to avoid a collapse of the December 1995 truce, the evangelicals agreed to halt temporarily construction of the temple. In September the traditional leadership in San Juan Chamula forced the mayor to step down and replaced him with a new leader who opposed construction of the temple. By the end of the year, however, temple construction was allowed to resume.

Several members of evangelical groups were jailed and fined in San Juan Yahe, Oaxaca. In addition, reliable press reports noted continued expulsions of evangelicals by that community because the evangelicals' faith violated the "customs and traditional practices" of the community.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has reported on and intervened in cases of religious discrimination and harassment, particularly in Chiapas. Over the last two years, Embassy officials have intervened in the case of Father Loren Riebe and two non-American priests who were expelled from Chiapas. Father Riebe denies the charges against them, which include inciting indigenous peasants to take over land, engaging in "political activities," and being associated with the Zapatista movement. The U.S. Ambassador raised the case with the Secretary of Government (Interior), presidential Chief of Staff, and the Archbishop of Mexico. In addition, Embassy officials and consular officers held meetings with the Secretariat of Foreign Relations, the U.S. Bishops' Conference, and the Papal Nuncio in Mexico concerning the case. The U.S. Embassy in Rome has raised the case with the Vatican. In addition, U.S. officials approached Mexico's Immigration Commissioner to request a favorable resolution to this case, including the granting of a visa for Father Riebe to return to Mexico. The case was also brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by Father Riebe. The U.S. Embassy has maintained regular contact with Father Riebe and his supporters.

Moldova

Current situation: The Government generally permits the free practice of religion. A 1992 law on religion codifies religious freedoms, although it contained restrictions that could inhibit the activities of some religious groups. The law requires that religious groups register with the Government in order to hire non-citizens, and it also prohibits proselytizing.

Some Protestant denominations are concerned that the prohibition on proselytizing could inhibit their activities, although many denominations hold revival meetings apparently without official interference. To date, the authorities have taken no legal action against individuals for proselytizing. The Salvation Army, however, was unable to register as a religious denomination because it did not meet the requirement of having a Moldovan citizen as the organization's legal head. However, it continues to operate.
Although Eastern Orthodoxy is not designated the official religion, it continues to be a strong religious force and exert significant influence. In 1992 a number of priests broke away from the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, in order to form the Bessarabian Orthodox Church. The Bessarabian Orthodox Church, which sees itself as the legal and canonical successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church in Bessarabia (the part of Moldova between the Dniester and Prut rivers), subordinated itself to the Bucharest Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Government has consistently refused to register the Bessarabian Church, citing unresolved property claims as the principal reason.

**U.S. Government actions:** U.S. Government officials have not raised the issue of religious freedom with the Moldovan Government because of the lack of complaints about curtailment of religious activity. The U.S. Embassy continues to monitor the human rights situation, including religious freedom.

**Morocco**

**Current situation:** Islam is the official religion. Although the constitution provides for freedom of worship, only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are tolerated in practice. Members of the Christian community, which consists mostly of foreigners, are allowed to practice their faith.

Islamic law and tradition call for strict punishment of any Muslim who converts to another faith, and any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. Ordinarily, foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work quietly.

In 1995, at least seven Moroccans were arrested, and in some cases sentenced to jail terms, for offenses related to their Christianity. In addition, a Salvadoran man and an American family were deported for evangelistic activities.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States maintains an ongoing dialogue with Morocco and provides assistance on human rights issues.

**Nepal**

**Current situation:** The constitution describes Nepal as a Hindu kingdom but permits the practice of all religions. This right is respected in practice, although conversion and proselytizing are prohibited. Foreigners convicted of proselytizing can be expelled from the country. In 1995, 11 Christians were convicted of proselytizing and were sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment. They were pardoned by the King and released unconditionally 2 months later.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Nepal, including respect for human rights.
Nicaragua

Current situation: The Nicaraguan constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice.

There were credible reports of instances of harassment of church officials, particularly in Managua, Leon, and Masaya. Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo and other church officials reported receiving anonymous telephone threats. Sporadic bombings of Catholic churches occurred during 1996, involving small explosive devices that caused minor damage to structures, but no casualties. Church officials believe that the harassment and attacks are the work of extremists who seek to intimidate the Church and halt its human rights and civic education and training campaigns. There have been no bombings since August 1996. In November 1996 a criminal court in Leon convicted 12 men for a number of the bombings and sentenced them to between 3 and 15 years in prison. Following the convictions, Sandinista National Liberation Front assembly deputies unsuccessfully tried to pass legislation pardoning the 12 persons.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has discussed cases of religious harassment, particularly in Managua, Leon, and Masaya, with Nicaraguan Government officials. A team of U.S. experts traveled to Nicaragua to train the police in investigative techniques for bombing incidents. The U.S. Ambassador and his staff have traveled throughout Nicaragua to meet with leaders of the various religious traditions. Religious persecution is addressed in the overall context of the promotion of human rights through regular contact with government officials, religious leaders, NGO representatives, and other interested groups and individuals.

Nigeria

Current situation: The Government generally respects freedom of religious belief, practice, and education, while taking measures to lessen the prospects for religious tension. State and local governments are prohibited from adopting a state religion. A 1987 ban on religious organizations in primary schools remains in effect, although individual students retain the right to practice their religion in recognized places of worship. Distribution of religious publications is generally unrestricted, although there is a lightly enforced ban on published religious advertisements, and religious programming remains closely controlled on television and radio. The Government discourages proselytizing, while not outlawing the practice. The Government bans open-air religious services away from places of worship. Christian and Muslim organizations accuse the government of restricting the entry of certain religious practitioners, particularly persons suspected of proselytizing.

In Kwara state in March 1996, state authorities ordered the closing of Christian schools that refused to teach Islamic studies. These schools supposedly had reacted to Islamic schools that were not required to teach Christian studies. After the transfer of the military administrator for the state, the schools were reopened. Also in Kwara state, in March 1997, soldiers beat and whipped members of the Christian Association of Nigeria during their annual Palm Sunday procession in Ilorin. An army captain had parked his car along the route, blocking the procession, and when
asked to move it, the captain enlisted several soldiers stationed nearby to attack the procession. Several of the Christian Association members were detained for 2 days.

**U.S. Government actions**: The U.S. Embassy encourages and advocates a broad-based democratic system with respect for human rights, including the free expression of religious values. Through many means (State Department press releases, testimony at hearings, public statements, Voice of America editorials, embassy demarches, visa restrictions and other sanctions, etc.) the U.S. Government has made clear U.S. opposition to the present regime's oppressive human rights policies.

**Pakistan**

**Current situation**: Pakistan's constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. Since 1986, Section 295(c) of the Penal Code has stipulated the death penalty for blaspheming the Prophet Mohammed. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, police opened one case against a Christian, Ayub Masih, under Section 295(c) in 1996. This blasphemy provision contributes to inter-religious tension, intimidation, fear, and violence.

The Government permits Muslims to convert to other faiths, but proselytizing among Muslims is illegal. Islamic extremists have assaulted, raped, and even murdered members of religious minorities. In many cases, police fail to take necessary precautions or investigate or prosecute those responsible.

This failure has contributed to a feeling of insecurity in many minority religious communities. In October 1996, in one well-publicized case, 14 (some say 19) Christian families fled the Punjab village Number 35 Eb Arfiwala following the arrest of one member of their community for alleged blasphemy. The families reportedly feared attack by Muslim neighbors angered by the alleged incident. By December, the families had not returned to their homes in the village.

In February 1997, Muslim mobs destroyed homes and churches belonging to Christians in the Khanewal area. Local police failed to take adequate steps to control the mobs and thousands of people were rendered homeless. Following the attack, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other officials visited the affected area, promised reparations for the victims, and publicly voiced support for minority rights.

Discriminatory religious legislation has led to acts of violence directed at Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and Zakris. Although the constitution prohibits discrimination in government employment, religious minorities are reportedly underrepresented at all levels of government service, especially in the senior ranks.

**U.S. Government actions**: The U.S. Government has repeatedly urged Pakistan to repeal the blasphemy law. The issue has been raised with Pakistani officials on several occasions in recent years. Although Pakistan has responded by adopting administrative procedures to soften the effect of the law, the problem remains a matter of concern and the U.S. Government continues to press the issue. The U.S. Government has also expressed concern to the Pakistani Prime Minister and
other officials over the February 1997 Khanewal riot, and urged equal legal protection for religious minorities.

U.S. Embassy and Consulate officials monitor individual cases of persecution and intervene with Pakistani government agencies when appropriate. In addition, U.S. Embassy officers meet regularly with leaders of religious communities, including Christians.

**Peru**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government respects this right in practice. Although the constitution establishes the separation of church and state, it does recognize Roman Catholicism as "an important element" in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation. Conversion to other religions is respected, and missionaries are allowed to enter the country and proselytize.

The Sendero Luminoso (SL) and Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (MRTA) terrorist factions reject the concept of religious faith, and continue to threaten and intimidate religious workers. During a period of some years prior to 1996, these terrorist groups particularly targeted North American officials of the Mormon Church: 24 Mormon Church houses were bombed; several Mormon Church administrators of food programs in Huancayo were murdered; and a number of officials at the Mormon Church regional headquarters in Lima were subjected to extortion, threatened with death unless they handed over large amounts of money.

According to the Mormon Church, its North American officials were not similarly targeted or victimized in 1996. Church officials believe this is due both to the fact that SL has geographically downsized its area of operations and to the fact that the Church no longer sends its North American missionaries into the highlands and upper Huallaga valley where the SL is most active.

**U.S. Government actions:** Both U.S. Embassy and State Department officials met with leaders of the Mormon Church on a number of occasions to discuss the targeting of Mormons by terrorist groups. The Embassy raised the matter with Peruvian government officials and encouraged them to do whatever they could to address the problem through their own contacts in the areas where harassment, threats, and bombings occurred. The Embassy also facilitated talks between Mormon leaders and Peruvian officials. The United States has supported the Peruvian Government's long-standing campaign to eliminate the terrorist threat in Peru, and U.S. Embassy officials have stressed the importance of ensuring that human rights are protected.

**Romania**

**Current situation:** The constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government does not generally impede the observance of religious belief. However, members of some groups, such as Baptists and Greek Catholics, who proselytize in traditionally Orthodox regions, have faced harassment and even violence. Several Protestant denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, made credible allegations that low-level government officials harassed them and impeded their efforts to proselytize and worship. In particular, foreign missionaries often experienced delays in
obtaining long-term visas. An international conference of Jehovah’s Witnesses scheduled for June 1996 in Bucharest was banned by the Government following public attacks by the Romanian Orthodox Church; a national conference later took place without incident in Cluj.

Under the provisions of a 1948 decree, the Government recognizes 15 religions, whose clergy may receive state financial support. (The Romanian Orthodox Church predominates.) The State Secretariat for Religious Affairs has licensed 385 other faiths, organizations, and foundations as religious associations under two 1924 laws on juridical entities, entitling them to juridical status as well as to exemptions from income and customs taxes, but not recognizing them as religions. As a result, these religious associations may not found churches and are not permitted to perform rites of baptism, marriage, or burial. The official registration of faiths and organizations is extremely slow because of bureaucratic delays.

U.S. Government actions: U.S. Embassy officials meet with representatives of Christian groups that have experienced difficulties in Romania to discuss their concerns about religious freedom. U.S. officials also meet with Romanian Government officials to discuss these matters. The U.S. Embassy expressed concern to the Romanian Government about its decision to ban the conference of Jehovah’s Witnesses initially scheduled for June 1996, and assumed a very active role in winning approval for a subsequently scheduled conference. The U.S. Embassy has strongly supported the efforts of U.S. missionaries to obtain proper Romanian visas.

**Russia**

**Current situation:** Russia's new constitution and a 1990 Soviet law on religion still in force provide for religious freedom and a strict separation of church and state. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the overall climate for religious freedom in Russia has improved dramatically, and made possible a large increase in the activities of foreign missionaries. This has troubled some sectors of Russian society, particularly nationalists and factions of the Russian Orthodox Church. During 1996 and 1997, the Russian Orthodox Church used its political influence to promote official actions that discriminate against religious groups and sects.

Most notably, the Duma and Federation Council recently passed legislation which, if enacted, would replace the 1990 law and introduce significantly more government regulation over religious organizations. While the law is not directed against Russia's established major faiths (Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism), it would impose registration requirements on religious groups, provide significant official discretion in decisions on registration, and would restrict the activities of foreign missionaries, as well as confessions, sects or religions, that are relatively new to Russia or that have relatively small numbers of adherents. These groups would have to wait up to 15 years before attaining full legal status, making it impossible for them to own property or have a bank account during this period. The draft legislation enjoys broad public support, but will not become law unless and until President Yeltsin signs it. (President Yeltsin previously rejected a similar proposal as unconstitutional.)

Some regional officials also have sought at times to limit the activities of foreign missionaries, many of whom are Christians. About one-fourth of Russia's 89 regional governments have passed
restrictive laws and decrees that violate the 1990 law on religion by limiting or restricting the activities of religious groups, or by requiring registration. Enforcement is uneven, but there are reports that local governments have prevented religious gatherings. As a result, denominations that do not have their own property were denied the opportunity to practice their faith in large groups or to hold prayer meetings. In 1996 the Constitutional Court refused to consider a challenge to the constitutionality of one such law on procedural grounds.

There have been numerous instances in which local authorities have refused to register the passports (a requirement under Russia's visa laws) of foreign missionaries, effectively denying them the ability to function in some regions. Non-Orthodox faiths, including the Catholic Church, have also had difficulties recovering properties that were confiscated during the Soviet era, although some progress was made in 1996.

U.S. Government actions: The United States has acted consistently to encourage Russia to fulfill completely its constitution and pledges of religious tolerance. In June 1997, President Clinton expressed concern to President Boris Yeltsin about the restrictive law on religion then pending in the Duma. Assistant Secretary of State Shattuck also voiced concern about the draft law and local restrictions on religious freedom to his Russian counterpart during bilateral consultations on human rights in May. President Clinton expressed concern about Aleksandr Lebed's inflammatory statements on missionary activities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints when he met with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin at the G-7 Summit in Lyon in June 1996. Vice President Gore reiterated those U.S. concerns the following month at a session of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission.

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and U.S. consulates have also been active in emphasizing the importance of freedom of conscience and religion. U.S. officials have voiced concern about initiatives by local and provincial governments to restrict the activities of missionary groups, and urged parliamentary deputies considering the new draft law on religion to uphold the principles of tolerance and separation of church and state embodied in the constitution and in the 1990 law.

The Embassy has frequently objected to attempts by the Russian authorities to administer visa regulations in a manner that restricts the freedom of movement of U.S. citizens, including missionaries, inside Russia.

Saudi Arabia

Current situation: Freedom of religion does not exist in Saudi Arabia. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government of Saudi Arabia believes that it has a unique position as guardian of the two holiest shrines of Islam, so it prohibits the public and private practice of other religions. Persons wearing religious symbols risk confrontation with the Mutawwa'in (religious police). The U.S. Embassy in Riyadh reports that both citizens and foreigners are targets of harassment by members of the Mutawwa'in and by religious vigilantes acting independently. Non-Muslim worshipers risk arrest, lashing, and deportation for engaging in any religious activity that attracts official attention. There are isolated reports of harassment and arrest of foreign workers conducting clandestine worship services, but precise numbers of such
incidents can not be determined. However, most non-Muslim religious services are conducted without any interference.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States has repeatedly raised human rights concerns with the Saudi Arabian Government. The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers have recently raised the issue of religious freedom with high government officials.

The U.S. Government regularly protests incidents in which U.S. citizens are improperly accosted by the Mutawwa'in. In 1996 the U.S. Consul General in Jeddah called on the governor of Medina region, and pressed him to curtail Mutawwa'in harassment in the region. The Consul General also discussed this issue with American community leaders, the Director of the Royal Commission in Yanbu, the chief of investment promotion, the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, and Mutawwa'in officials. The U.S. Government strongly protested an incident in late 1993, in which Mutawwa'in violently broke up a children's winter concert at the Yanbu International School. Soon after, the Saudi Arabian Government formally notified the U.S. Government that it neither approved nor agreed with such behavior by members of the Mutawwa'in, and that necessary measures had been taken to ensure that there would be no repetitions.

Privately-run religious services, attended by both U.S. Government employees and private Americans, are held regularly on the grounds of at least one U.S. diplomatic facility in Saudi Arabia. In instances where religious services are not presently held at U.S. diplomatic facilities, religious services take place at other locations locally.

**Serbia-Montenegro**

**Current situation:** There is no state religion, but the Government gives preferential treatment, including access to state-run television for major religious events, to the Serbian Orthodox Church to which the majority of Serbs belong. Religion and ethnicity are so closely intertwined as to be inseparable. All of Serbia's religious/ethnic minorities face serious discrimination and harassment, including the Catholic minority in Vojvodina, largely made up of ethnic Hungarians and Croats.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Government has repeatedly urged the Government of Serbia to respect the human rights of its citizens, and contribute to a settlement of the Bosnian conflict that ensures that human rights are respected, including religious freedom.

**Singapore**

**Current situation:** All religious groups are subject to government scrutiny and must be legally registered. The Government restricts some religious groups and has banned others, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The 1990 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act made illegal what the Government deems to be the inappropriate involvement of religious groups and officials in political affairs. The act also prohibits judicial review of any possible denial of rights arising from the act, and it specifically denies judicial review of its enforcement. Missionaries are permitted to work and to publish religious texts.
The Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 on the grounds that the group opposes military service, and its roughly 2,000 members refuse to perform military service, salute the flag, or swear oaths of allegiance to the State. In July 1996, a 72-year-old woman was arrested and convicted for possession of banned Jehovah's Witness literature. She was sentenced to a $500 fine. She refused to pay and was ordered to jail for 7 days. She was first arrested in February 1995, along with 69 other suspected Jehovah's Witnesses, at which time the police seized books, magazines, periodicals, and other materials believed to be related to the group. Of the 69 persons arrested, 28 were tried and found guilty of holding a meeting of a "banned society" and were fined between $500 and $2,000.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy has discussed religious freedom with the Government of Singapore in the overall context of the protection of human rights. The Embassy maintains a dialogue with the Government on a wide range of human rights issues, including religious freedom, and raised its concern in 1996 about the arrest of the 72-year-old woman.

Slovakia

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and faith, and the Government respects this provision in practice. Under existing law, only registered churches and religious organizations have the explicit right to conduct public worship services and other activities, although no specific religions or practices are banned or discouraged by the authorities. The State provides financial subsidies only to registered churches and religious organizations, of which there are 15.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy monitors the registration process for discrimination against certain religious groups.

Somalia

Current situation: In the absence of a recognized national government, religious freedom has become a matter of local custom and practice. Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Local tradition and past law make proselytizing a crime for any religion except Islam. Some local administrations have made Islam the official religion, and adopted Islamic (Shari'a) judicial systems. The Sunni majority often views non-Muslims with suspicion, and there is strong pressure to respect Muslim traditions in fundamentalist enclaves. There is a small Christian community that maintains a low profile; Christian international relief organizations generally operate without interference.

U.S. Government actions: In the absence of any organized government with which to engage, the U.S. Government focuses its efforts on effecting a reconciliation of the various warring parties in Somalia, and the reconstruction of democratic institutions on a national basis.

Sri Lanka

Current situation: Buddhism is the official national religion. However, the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and this right is respected in practice. There is a thriving Christian
community with more than a million members, mostly Roman Catholics. Foreign clergy are allowed to enter and work in Sri Lanka but the Government prohibits the entry of new Jesuits (foreign Jesuits already in the country are permitted to remain). Evangelical Christians have reported that their proselytizing efforts often meet with hostility and harassment from local Buddhist clergy.

**U.S. Government actions:** The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Sri Lanka, including respect for human rights.

**Sudan**

**Current situation:** Although the military regime in Sudan has stated that all religions should be respected, in practice the Sudanese Government treats Islam as the de facto state religion. Forced conversion to Islam of Christians, animists, and other non-Muslims takes place as part of government policy. The 14-year-old civil war between the mainly Islamic north and the largely animist and Christian south has claimed more than a million lives. In war zones, government efforts to restrict religious freedom are particularly heavy-handed—churches are closed or permission to build them is denied, clergy are harassed, and members of indigenous faiths are persecuted. There are reports that many Christians are victims of slave raids and forced conversion, and that some Christian children have been forced into reeducation camps where they are given Arab names and raised as Muslims.

**U.S. Government actions:** The United States has been at the forefront of efforts to highlight and seek rectification of continuing systematic human rights abuses, including religious persecution. At the 1997 UNHRC, the United States led efforts to adopt a resolution strongly condemning Sudan's human rights record, including religious persecution and forced conversion of Christians and animists. In 1996 the U.S. Government led efforts to pass tough resolutions at the UNHRC and the UNGA to condemn Sudan for human rights abuses and to urge redress.

At the UNHRC, the U.S. delegation helped secure from the Sudanese Government an invitation to visit the country for the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Sudan, whom the Government had barred from visiting for two years. In his February 1996 report, the Rapporteur concluded that people of all faiths "are equally exposed to violations and abuses" stemming from the civil war. The Rapporteur's report cited the "severe religious persecution of Christians" in government-controlled major towns, especially Kadugli and Dilling. To stem these abuses the U.S. Government continues to play a leading role in efforts to obtain a negotiated settlement of the civil war.

In 1996 the U.S. Ambassador expressed U.S. concerns about religious freedom, including reports of the persecution of Christians, to Sudanese officials, including the Minister of Justice and the Rapporteur of Sudan's Advisory Council on Human Rights. The Ambassador also traveled to Juba, a city in southern Sudan and a garrison town of the Government. He met with a large group of southern clergy—Muslims, Anglican bishops, and Catholics, and with Governor Agnes Lokudu, a practicing Christian Dinka woman and government official who has strong influence in the region.
The U.S. Government has received reports attesting to persecution of Christians, as well as reports from Lokudu asserting that Christians are not persecuted in areas under her jurisdiction.

The United States suspended its resident diplomatic presence in Sudan in February 1996. Infrequent visits to Sudan by the Ambassador and the absence of a reporting staff limit the ability of the U.S. Government to identify emergent human rights situations.

**Syria**

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. All religions and sects must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all meetings by religious groups, except for worship. Credible observers report that churches, as well as mosques and synagogues, are closely controlled by the Government, including monitoring of sermons and worship services. There is no law prohibiting proselytization, but the Government discourages such activity. There is mandatory religious instruction in schools, with government-approved teachers and curriculum. Although there is a significant amount of religious tolerance, religion or ethnic affiliation can be contributing factors in determining career opportunities.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Government has urged Syria to cease its domestic repression, to improve its human rights practices, and to grant citizens basic human rights.

**Tunisia**

Current situation: Islam is the state religion, but the Government permits the practice of other religions and there are harmonious relations among the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The Christian community, estimated at about 2,000, is composed mainly of foreigners. It freely holds church services and operates a small number of schools. In a gesture toward tolerance and ecumenism, Tunisia hosted a visit by the Pope in April 1996.

The Government views proselytizing as an act against "public order." Authorities ask foreigners suspected of proselytizing to depart the country and do not permit them to return. There were no reported arrests for proselytizing within the last 5 years, although in 1994 the authorities did not renew the residency permits of some foreigners suspected of proselytizing.

U.S. Government actions: The United States has raised the issue of religious freedom with the Government of Tunisia, and maintains an ongoing dialogue with Tunisia on human rights issues.

**Turkey**

Current situation: The constitution establishes Turkey as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and private dissemination of religious ideas. The Government generally observes these provisions in practice. About 99 percent of the population are Muslim. Under the law, religious services may take place only in designated places of worship.
Although Turkey is a secular state, religious instruction in state schools is compulsory for Muslims. Upon written verification of their non-Muslim background, Lausanne Treaty minorities (Greek, Armenian, and Jewish) are exempted by law from Muslim religious instruction, although students who wish to attend may do so with parental consent. Syriac Christians are not officially exempt because they are not an official Lausanne Treaty minority. However, according to a church official, because the community is mentioned in the Treaty, its members have not been forced to follow any specific curriculum.

Many prosecutors regard proselytizing and religious activism on the part of either Islamic extremists or evangelical Christians with suspicion, especially when they deem such activities to have political overtones. Since there is no law explicitly prohibiting proselytizing, police sometimes arrest Islamic extremists and evangelical Christians for disturbing the peace. Courts usually dismiss such charges. If the proselytizers are foreigners, they may be deported, but generally they are able to reenter the country easily.

Most religious minorities are concentrated in Istanbul. The number of Christians in the south has been declining as the younger Syriac generation leaves for Europe and North America. Minority religions not recognized under the Lausanne Treaty may not acquire additional property for churches. The Catholic Church in Ankara, for example, is confined to diplomatic property. The State must approve the operation of churches, monasteries, synagogues, schools, and charitable religious foundations, such as hospitals and orphanages.

The Government formed in July 1996 has sought a more cooperative relationship with religious minorities, particularly in Istanbul, according to prominent members of these communities. The state ministry responsible for the religious minority communities gave the Armenian Patriarchate permission to rebuild a church in Anatolia and informed the Patriarchate that requests to restore some other properties would be approved immediately. These requests have all been approved without delay.

The authorities monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches and their affiliated operations. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul has consistently expressed interest in reopening the seminary on the island of Halki in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary has been closed since the 1970's when the State nationalized most private institutions of higher learning.

Bureaucratic procedures relating to historic preservation impede repairs to some religious facilities. Under the law, religious buildings that become "extinct" (because of prolonged absence of clergy or lay persons to staff local religious councils or for lack of adherents) revert to government possession. Some non-Muslim minorities, particularly the Greek Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, the shrinking Armenian Orthodox and Jewish communities, are faced with the danger of losing some of their houses of worship.

During the past few years, there have been instances of graffiti, stones tossed over the walls, and press attacks on the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarch. In September 1996, a hand grenade was thrown over the wall of the Ecumenical Patriarchate compound in Istanbul causing minor damage. In December, a small pipe bomb exploded at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in
Istanbul. The police responded promptly in both cases and investigated the incidents. The Armenian Patriarchate also reported incidents of harassment against Armenian churches in Istanbul, and church officials complain of growing encroachment by certain Muslim extremist groups on lands belonging to the Armenian community, especially on the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara. The police have responded with intensified security measures.

Turkey is a party to the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, but is not party to the related Protocol. As a consequence, it has not extended its obligations concerning refugees to cover those refugees who arrive from outside Europe. The Government does not provide durable settlement solutions to non-European asylum seekers and requires that they register with the authorities within 5 days of entering the country. The Government screens these applicants to determine those that it considers bona fide, and then refers them to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for settlement elsewhere. A negative decision usually leads to immediate expulsion. Under this policy, Iranian and Iraqi asylum seekers have been turned back, many of whom claimed to be fleeing religious persecution in their home countries due to their conversion to Christianity.

U.S. Government actions: U.S. Embassy officers--as well as other U.S. Government officials who visit Turkey--meet frequently with the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox faith, the Armenian Patriarch, and other religious leaders to discuss their concerns about religious liberty in Turkey. U.S. officials also meet with Turkish government officials to discuss these matters. In March 1996, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, the U.S. Ambassador, and other U.S. officials convened an ecumenical meeting of religious leaders in Turkey to address specific concerns and promote greater tolerance among religious groups. The meeting was lauded by all participants as an historic event.

The U.S. Government has protested Turkey's practice of turning back Iranian and Iraqi asylum seekers. On numerous occasions, U.S. officials have expressed serious concern to Turkish government officials about inadequate opportunities for asylum applicants to register with Turkish authorities. The United States has urged the Government of Turkey to extend the registration period beyond the current 5-day limit, and to permit applicants to register at facilities staffed by professionally-trained officials in population centers. Turkish officials have agreed to meet with UNHCR officials to discuss the handling of applications in the future.

Turkmenistan

Current situation: The citizenry is overwhelmingly Muslim, though organized Islam does not play a prominent role in government or society. The constitution provides for freedom of religion. Religious organizations are required to register with the Government, but the Government has not denied registration to any group. There is no law specifically addressing religious proselytizing. The Government requires permission for any mass meetings for this purpose. Orthodox churches operate without interference and offer a variety of religious literature.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Turkmenistan, including respect for human rights.
Ukraine

Current situation: The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religion provide for separation of church and state and permit religious organizations to establish places of worship and to train clergy. The Government respects these rights in practice. However, the law restricts the activities of non-native religious organizations. Religious organizations are required to register with local authorities and with the Government's Committee for Religious Affairs, a process that generally takes about one month. There is no official state religion.

A 1993 amendment to the 1991 law restricts the activities of non-native religious organizations. It requires that members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other foreign citizen representatives of foreign organizations preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities "only in those religious organizations which invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization."

In addition, local officials have occasionally impeded the activities of foreign religious workers. All regional administrations have departments responsible for registration of various denominations and religious groups, and for supervision of compliance with the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religion. Neither the State Committee on Religious Affairs, nor its regional departments have the authority to de-register religious groups; they can be de-registered only by court decision.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy continues to monitor the human rights situation, including religious freedom.

United Arab Emirates

Current situation: Islam is the official religion of all the emirates. Citizens are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Non-Muslims are free to practice their religion but may not proselytize publicly or distribute religious literature. Major cities have Christian churches, some built on land donated by the ruling families. The Government permits foreign clergy to minister to expatriate congregations.

Mrs. Mona Ghaleb, a United Arab Emirates Muslim woman, has said that her husband, Elie Dib Ghaleb, a Lebanese Christian, was jailed for marrying a Muslim. The Government states that he was convicted for fornication that occurred prior to his wedding, not on other charges. Mrs. Ghaleb denies this charge. Her husband remains in jail, although his term was completed. He reportedly has been beaten in prison. His sentence of 39 lashes has not been carried out, but remains under consideration.

U.S. Government actions: The United States has an ongoing dialogue with the United Arab Emirates concerning human rights. U.S. Government officials have raised the case of Elie Dib Ghaleb at a high level with the U.A.E. Government, and will continue to follow the case.
United Kingdom

Current situation: The conflict in Northern Ireland between unionists, who are primarily Protestant and want the province to remain part of the United Kingdom, and nationalists, who are primarily Catholic and want Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland, continues, and inter-communal violence remains a problem.

U.S. Government actions: In keeping with its commitment to help people of different faiths find common ground, the United States seeks to contribute to a peaceful resolution of this conflict. The U.S. Government has strongly supported the multi-party talks, which began in June 1996 in Belfast under the chairmanship of former Senator George Mitchell. Representatives of the nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland are participating.

Since the inception of the talks, the U.S. Government has attempted to move the process forward, and has made clear to all participants its view that there can be no alternative to this peace process.

Uzbekistan

Current situation: The constitution provides for freedom of religion and the separation of religion and state. Russian Orthodox and several other Christian denominations operate freely. However, tensions arise when churches attempt to convert across ethnic lines, particularly the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Missionary activity and proselytizing are illegal.

U.S. Government actions: The U.S. Embassy discusses a wide range of issues with the Government of Uzbekistan, including respect for human rights.

Vietnam

Current situation: Although the Vietnamese constitution and government decrees provide for freedom of worship, the regime continues to restrict severely religious activities that it defines as being at variance with state laws and policies. The 1992 constitution provides for the "freedom of religious belief," including "the right to build buildings for religious use." However, the same article adds that "no one can use religion as a means to drag in foreign powers" or to disrupt the social order. In practice, the regime permits organized religious activity except that which it perceives as challenging the interests of the State.

All religious organizations are required to obtain government permission to hold training seminars and conventions, to build or remodel places of worship, to engage in charitable activities or operate religious schools, and to ordain, promote, or transfer clergy. Religious groups continue to face difficulty in obtaining teaching materials, expanding training facilities, and publishing religious materials. There do not appear, however, to be significant constraints on the rights of individuals to attend Government approved churches to worship, and Christian holidays are publicly observed.
There are two Christian denominations approved by the Government in Vietnam: the Catholic Church and the Christian Missionary Alliance. The Christian Missionary Alliance of Vietnam is the only government-approved Protestant organization in the country. The Government places restrictions on proselytizing activity but church attendance continues to grow. Arrests and government harassment of some ethnic Hmong Protestants for proselytizing in northern Vietnamese villages has occurred from time to time. Some Catholic priests and Buddhist monks remain in prison serving sentences for preaching outside the Government approved church organizations.

The Government insists on the right to approve Vatican appointments, and this issue remains under discussion. The Government maintains restrictions on other activities of the Protestant and Catholic churches including the right to assemble, speak, and teach.

In the past two years several U.S. citizens have been charged and detained for disseminating religious materials. In 1996, Mrs. Man Thi Jones, a U.S.-Vietnam dual national citizen, was accused by local authorities in Phan Rang of distributing religious materials without authorization and found guilty of "activities in Vietnam not in accordance with the reason for her entry." The alleged violation involved administrative law and was not a criminal matter. Local authorities interrogated Mrs. Jones on several occasions and threatened her with imprisonment, although she was not arrested or incarcerated. Mrs. Jones was fined 30 million dong (approximately $900). Her passport was held by the police during the investigation.

U.S. Government actions: President Clinton's decision to normalize relations with Vietnam helped to facilitate and strengthen U.S. Government efforts to expand the pursuit of human rights objectives in that country. The United States has raised the issue of religious freedom with the Vietnamese Government on numerous occasions. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord raised human rights issues, including freedom of religion, when they visited Vietnam in July 1996. In March 1997, a State Department delegation traveled to Hanoi to participate in the fifth bilateral human rights dialogue. The issue of religious freedom, including persecution of Christians, was mentioned repeatedly. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin raised human rights throughout his visit to Vietnam in April 1997, as did Secretary Albright during her July 1997 visit.

The U.S. Embassy frequently discusses religious freedom issues with the Vietnamese Government. The State Department has forwarded to the U.S. Embassy a list of Christians who allege government persecution. The United States has expressed its deep concern about these problems and has also urged the Vietnamese Government to establish a dialogue with the country's religious institutions in order to resolve some of these issues. The U.S. Government is exploring ways to cooperate with other like-minded governments on human rights in Vietnam, and also has followed closely the Vatican's efforts to resolve its differences with the Vietnamese Government. The United States has asked the Government of Vietnam for a clear explanation of its restrictions on normal religious activity--the right to assemble, speak, and teach--by the Protestant and Catholic churches, particularly since both churches are recognized by the Government.
The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi actively followed the case of Mrs. Man Thi Jones met with Mrs. Jones, Vietnamese authorities in Hanoi, and the provincial authorities in Phan Rang as soon as the Embassy became aware of the case. A consular officer traveled twice to the village where she was being interrogated. The U.S. Charge raised this case with senior Vietnamese officials, stating that this case raises serious questions regarding protection of religious freedom in Vietnam and emphasizing that both the restriction on Mrs. Jones and the fine imposed were unreasonable. He urged that Mrs. Jones's fine be waived and her money returned. He also said that Mrs. Jones's case underscored U.S. concerns about mistreatment of leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and restrictions on the Protestant and Catholic churches.

The U.S. Embassy sent three diplomatic notes to the Vietnamese Government requesting information on Mrs. Jones's situation. Mrs. Jones appealed the decision and requested a reduction in the fine. However, the fine, as initially imposed, was paid. Mrs. Jones's appeal stands and can be considered even though she departed Vietnam in December 1996. The U.S. Government has urged the Vietnamese Government to refund Mrs. Jones's money. Yemen

Current situation: Islam is the state religion, and there are restrictions on the practice of other religions. Virtually all citizens are Muslims. Most Christians are foreign residents, except for a few families of Indian origin in Aden. There are several churches in Aden, which hold regular services, but no non-Muslim public places of worship in the former North Yemen. Church services are, however, regularly held there without harassment in private homes or facilities such as schools.

Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community are employed in teaching, social services, and health care. A hospital in Jibla operated by the Baptist Church has, in the past, experienced occasional threats and harassment from local Islamic extremists who feared that the hospital might be used to spread Christianity. Since an August 1995 incident of mob violence at the hospital, which was eventually controlled by the authorities, the hospital has not been threatened. Mother Theresa has active charity operations in three cities.

U.S. Government actions: The United States has an ongoing dialogue with Yemen concerning human rights, and has provided assistance in this area as well. The U.S. Embassy assisted the hospital in Jibla when it experienced harassment, threats, and a mob attack.

* This report was prepared pursuant to the Managers Statement which accompanies the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1997, House Report 3610: "that the Department of State report to the Congress on or before January 15, 1997 with a detailed summary of United States policies designed to reduce and eliminate today's mounting persecution of Christians throughout the world." By agreement with the Managers, the publication date for this report was extended to facilitate the gathering of additional information.