

## **CHINA (INCLUDES TIBET, HONG KONG, AND MACAU) 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

### **Executive Summary**

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

The People's Republic of China's constitution states citizens have "freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" and does not define "normal." In practice, the government exercised state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, according to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international media reports. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant), are permitted to register with the government and are officially permitted to hold worship services.

Over this past year, there continued to be reports that the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. Human rights organizations stated police shot and killed Uighur Muslims during house raids and protests after conflicts arose due to stricter government controls on religious expression and practice in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. A Falun Gong group reported abductions, detention, and a death in police custody. The government continued to cite concerns over the "three evils" of "ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism" as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uighur Muslims. The government sought the forcible repatriation of Uighurs from foreign countries, many of whom sought asylum in those countries on the grounds of religious persecution.

According to media and NGO reports, seven Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, self-immolated during the year in protest of restrictive government policies, including those restricting religious freedom. Authorities often justified official interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating them with separatism and pro-independence activities. Authorities in Zhejiang Province ordered the destruction of more than 1,500 crosses on Christian churches, as well as some church buildings, as part of a campaign against "illegal structures," according to NGO and press reports. Many Zhejiang pastors and congregants

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openly resisted the campaign, resulting in the detention of several church leaders and activists, including Pastor Huang Yizi in September, and human rights lawyer Zhang Kai, detained by authorities immediately prior to a scheduled meeting with the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. Local authorities in many areas used a variety of means to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups, including Christian “house churches.” Authorities in Guangdong Province sentenced Buddhist leader Wu Zeheng to life in prison on what advocacy groups stated were politically motivated charges. In some parts of the country, however, local authorities allowed or at least did not interfere with the activities of unregistered religious groups.

Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. Discrimination was particularly acute around politically “sensitive” anniversaries and major religious events. In Xinjiang, tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese continued. For example, many hospitals and businesses reportedly would not provide services to women wearing veils.

U.S. officials, including the President and the Secretary of State, repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about violations of religious freedom in China. U.S. officials consistently urged the government to adhere to internationally recognized rights of religious freedom. In meeting with members from diverse religious communities, U.S. officials also acknowledged some improvements in the ability of some house churches to meet and operate. The embassy protested the imprisonment of individuals on charges related to religious freedom. The Ambassador highlighted the importance of religious freedom during his May visit to Lhasa and Xi’an, and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom reiterated this during his August visit to Beijing, Shijiazhuang, Shanghai, and Hangzhou.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On February 29, 2016, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

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### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (July 2015 estimate). In its report to the UN Human Rights Council during China's Universal Periodic Review in October 2013, the Chinese government stated there were more than 100 million religious believers, 360,000 clergy, 140,000 places of worship, and 5,500 religious groups. Government estimates of religious adherents have remained unchanged for years. Many experts believe official estimates grossly understate numbers of religious adherents, though unofficial estimates vary widely. For example, a 2007 survey conducted by East China Normal University stated that 31.4 percent of citizens aged 16 years and over were religious believers. The same survey estimated there were 200 million Buddhists, Taoists, or worshippers of folk gods, although accurate estimates are difficult to make because many adherents practice exclusively at home.

According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), there are more than 21 million Muslims; unofficial estimates range as high as 50 million. Hui Muslims are concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. Uighur Muslims live primarily in Xinjiang. The State Council's *2015 White Paper on Xinjiang* reports Hui, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur, and other ethnic minorities constitute 14.63 million residents in Xinjiang, or 63 percent of the total population.

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

The *2011 Blue Book of Religions*, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a research institution directly reporting to the State Council, reported the number of Protestants to be between 23 and 40 million. A June 2010 SARA report estimated there were 16 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches. According to 2012 Pew Research Center estimates, there were 68 million Protestants, of whom 23 million are affiliated with the TSPM. According to SARA, there are 60,000 registered Protestant churches and 23 Christian theological colleges.

According to SARA, more than 5.5 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), the state-sanctioned organization for all

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officially recognized Catholic churches. The Pew Center estimates there are nine million Catholics, 5.7 million of whom are affiliated with the CPA.

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

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

#### **Legal Framework**

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

CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. Members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and being a member is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career.

The 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs requires religious groups to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. These five associations operate under the direction of the CCP United Front Work Department. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Proselytizing in public or meeting in unregistered places of worship is not permitted. Tibetan Buddhists in China are not free to venerate the Dalai Lama openly. The country’s laws and policies do not provide a mechanism for religious

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groups independent of the five official government patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

All religious organizations are required to register with SARA or its provincial and local offices. Registered religious organizations are allowed to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations. According to regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization's historical background, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and a government sponsor.

In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments permit certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces. Worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, has been reclassified as “cultural heritage” rather than religious practice.

The government and the Holy See do not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican has no representative in the country. The CPA does not recognize the authority of the Holy See to appoint Catholic bishops; approximately 40 Catholic bishops remain independent of the CPA and operate unofficially. Several of those bishops have been detained for many years or are under close government surveillance. The Regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops requires candidate bishops to publicly pledge support for the CCP.

Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations,” and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison. A judicial explanation states this term refers to “those illegal groups that have been found using religions, *qigong* [a traditional Chinese exercise discipline], or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society.” There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. The government maintains a ban on the Guanyin Method Sect (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Lord

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God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and South China Church.

A National Security Law passed in July by the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) explicitly bans "cult organizations." An amendment to the criminal law passed by the NPCSC in August increases the maximum possible sentence for "organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law" from 15 years to life in prison.

The religious and social regulations permit official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities, such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP's United Front Work Department, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations. Most leaders of official government religious organizations serve in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a CCP-led body that provides advice to the central government from business leaders, academics, and other segments of society.

A law implemented by the Urumqi Municipal People's Congress Standing Committee in January prohibits residents from wearing veils that cover the face. A separate regulation approved by the Xinjiang People's Congress Standing Committee in January bans the practice of religion in government buildings and the wearing of clothes associated with "religious extremism." An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Supreme People's Court published in November criminalizes the act of forcing others to wear "extremist" garments. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols are considered "extremist."

Since 2005, SARA has stated through a policy posted on its website that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government.

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

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

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

Patriotic religious associations and registered religious organizations are allowed to compile and print religious materials for internal use. To distribute religious materials publicly, an organization must follow national printing regulations, which restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. Under the law, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated and unauthorized publishing houses closed. The government allows some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

Under national regulations, parents are permitted to instruct children under 18 in the beliefs of officially recognized religious groups, and children may participate in religious activities. Xinjiang officials, however, require minors to complete nine years of compulsory education before they can receive religious education. In Xinjiang, regulations forbid minors from participating in religious activities and impose penalties on organizations and individuals who “organize, entice, or force” minors to participate in religious activities.

The teaching of atheism in schools is mandated.

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

Birth limitation policies remain in force, but Chinese authorities further relaxed the one-child policy in November to allow all Chinese couples to have two children.

The constitution states official government religious bodies are not “subject to any foreign domination.” A CCP directive to universities provides guidance on how to prevent proselytizing among university students by foreigners.

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The law permits domestic NGOs, including religious organizations, to receive donations in foreign currency. The law requires documented approval by SARA of donations from foreign sources to domestic religious groups of more than one million renminbi (RMB) (\$154,000). Overseas donations received by religious organizations receive favorable tax treatment if the funds are used for charitable activities.

### Government Practices

There were reports the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. The government cited concerns over the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Throughout the country, religious affairs officials and security organs scrutinized and restricted the religious activities of registered and unregistered religious and spiritual groups, including assembling for religious worship, expressing religious beliefs in public and in private, and publishing religious texts. The government’s repression of religious freedom remained most severe in Xinjiang and in Tibetan areas, according to media and NGO sources.

Human rights organizations reported some instances of security forces firing their weapons at groups of Uighurs. Authorities typically characterized these operations as targeting “separatists” or “terrorists.” According to reports, these actions bred resentment and, at times, deadly protests.

In September reports stated 50 people were killed and dozens wounded after an attack at the Sogan coal mine in Baicheng County in Xinjiang. Citing a government official in Baicheng, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported the Uighur attackers might have been seeking vengeance for what the official described as a coercive government campaign aimed at combating “religious extremism.” According to RFA, government sources reported authorities conducted a police raid and killed 28 Uighur Muslim suspects believed to have carried out the mine attack, including 11 women and children. State media reported 28 “terrorist gang” members from three families were killed. Government sources reported to RFA that all three Uighur Muslim families showed signs of “religious extremism,” stating the women wore headscarves and long dresses.

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According to a report published by Ming Hui, a U.S.-based news organization affiliated with Falun Gong, Fujian Province officials intimidated, kidnapped, abducted, sentenced, or sent to reeducation camps 13 members of the Falun Gong in the first half of the year. Among them, three were sentenced to prison and one died in police detention.

Pastor Zhang Shaojie, a TSPM pastor in Nanle County, Henan Province, remained in prison after a court sentenced him to 12 years for “picking quarrels and disturbing public order” and “fraud” in July 2014. Zhang and several members of his congregation had been involved in a land dispute between the church and the Nanle County government. Advocacy groups reported authorities subjected family members and other members of the church to police surveillance, verbal threats, and unannounced investigations throughout the year.

In Guangdong Province, founder of the Buddhist Huazang Dharma group Wu Zeheng, also known as Master Xingwu, was sentenced to life in prison in October on charges including rape, fraud, producing and selling toxic food, and organizing a “cult.” He and more than a dozen followers were arrested in coordinated raids in 2014 on charges of using a “cult organization” to undermine the implementation of the law. Wu and followers detained during the raids remained in detention throughout the year as authorities purportedly gathered evidence to try his case. Some human rights organizations and media reports stated that authorities targeted Wu for his religious beliefs and his human rights activism and that the criminal charges were spurious.

Other Buddhists monks reported harassment against themselves and family members. Zen Buddhist monk Lin Bin (also known as Master Wangyun) of Fujian Province was taken into custody by the police in July while visiting Sichuan Province. At the same time, his temple in Ningde, Fujian Province, was shut down and his mother, who served as janitor at the temple, was forcefully relocated to a temple in Badu Township in Ningde. Police confiscated all items in the temple. Authorities arrested Wangyun in connection with his participation in protests against a heavy metal extracting and coating plant project that severely polluted the environment, according to reports.

Underground Catholic priest Song Wanjun’s whereabouts remained unknown after he was detained by officials in Hebei Province in August 2013. There was no new information on Su Zhimin, an unregistered Catholic bishop who disappeared after being taken into police custody in 1996. In February authorities reported to the

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family of underground Catholic Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yi County, Hebei Province, that the Bishop died in prison 14 years after his disappearance. Authorities had held him without charge at an unknown location since 2001.

Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who is recognized by the Vatican as the successor to Aloysius Jin Luxian as Bishop of Shanghai, has rarely been seen in public after announcing his resignation from the CPA during his July 2012 Vatican-sanctioned consecration ceremony. He reportedly has spent most of his time since in seclusion at the Sheshan Catholic Seminary outside Shanghai, although he occasionally posted on social media and his blog. The Shanghai Diocese did not have a leader after Jin Luxian's death in April 2013, and at year's end it was being managed by a five-priest caretaker council.

Harassment of unregistered bishops and priests continued, including government surveillance and repeated detentions. In March local religious affairs bureau officials and police in Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang, detained unregistered Catholic priests Shao Yunquan and Cao Jianyou just as they finished celebrating Mass. The Mudanjiang church reported local religious affairs bureau officials often interrupted their services.

Individuals belonging to or supporting other banned groups were imprisoned or sentenced to administrative detention on charges such as “distributing cult materials” or “using a heretical organization to subvert the law.” In April courts in Shijiazhuang Municipality, Hebei Province, sentenced Bian Xiaohui, the daughter of an imprisoned Falun Gong practitioner, to more than three years in prison. The courts also sentenced Bian's aunt Chen Yinghua, a Falun Gong practitioner, to four years in prison. Authorities detained the pair in March 2014 after Bian held up a sign reading “I want to see my father” outside of a Shijiazhuang prison where her father, Bian Lichao, was serving a 12-year sentence for practicing Falun Gong, and Chen documented the protest online.

Religious groups reported that “patriotic religious associations” were subjected to various forms of CCP interference in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice. Local authorities pressured religious believers to affiliate with patriotic associations and used administrative detention, including confinement and abuse in administrative detention centers, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups. While reeducation-through-labor camps were officially abolished in 2013, advocacy groups and international media reported some camps simply had been relabeled and continued to hold members of religious and spiritual groups.

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Some prisoners and detainees of faith were forced to recant their beliefs (particularly Falun Gong practitioners, whom the government reportedly subjected to “transformation through reeducation”) or were not provided adequate access to religious materials, facilities, or clergy. For example, in Zhejiang Province, detention centers denied family members’ requests to deliver Bibles and food to the detained.

International Falun Gong-affiliated NGOs and international media reported detentions of Falun Gong practitioners continued to increase around “sensitive” dates. Authorities instructed neighborhood communities to report Falun Gong members to officials and offered monetary rewards to citizens who informed on Falun Gong practitioners. Ahead of the March meetings of the National People’s Congress and CPPCC, Tianjin authorities detained at least 20 Falun Gong practitioners and confiscated Falun Gong texts, computers, cell phones, and other personal belongings, according to the Falun Gong-affiliated news outlet Ming Hui. Ming Hui reported Tianjin Public Security Bureau Director Zhao Fei offered awards of 10,000 RMB (\$1,540) to officers for each practitioner taken into custody.

Detained practitioners were reportedly subjected to various methods of physical and psychological coercion, such as sleep deprivation, in attempts to force them to renounce their beliefs. Reports from overseas Falun Gong-affiliated advocacy groups estimated thousands of adherents in the country had been given terms of up to three years in administrative detention. According to the human rights monitoring NGO Dui Hua Foundation, there were 2,882 Falun Gong prisoners serving sentences as of October 31. While this number was an increase from 2014, Dui Hua noted that the increase did not necessarily signify a crackdown on Falun Gong members, as there has been a trend of lighter sentencing over the last five years, including a number of suspended sentences.

According to a report published by Ming Hui, in Guangdong Province authorities “persecuted, intimidated, kidnapped, disappeared, sentenced, or sent to reeducation-through-labor camps” 91 Falun Gong practitioners in the first half of the year. Of these, 24 Falun Gong members were prosecuted and seven sentenced to terms of imprisonment from one to four years, according to the report. The report stated many lawyers defending Falun Gong members were forbidden from meeting with their clients, faced harassment by police or officials from the justice department, and were threatened with revocation of their professional licenses

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unless they withdrew to allow for replacement by a court-appointed lawyer. Lawyers were unable to exercise normal legal functions in all Falun Gong-related court trials, such as by presenting defense statements or evidence or witnesses, according to reports by Ming Hui and legal advocates. Some lawyers were expelled by the judge on-site and ejected from the court by police.

Human rights organizations report multiple Falun Gong practitioners were detained under suspicion of “subversion of state power,” including Zheng Jingxian in June and Huang Qian in February. The detained were reportedly subjected to physical abuse and interrogations, denied access to their attorneys, or sent to reeducation camps. According to Falun Gong advocacy groups, on August 25 Falun Gong member Guo Bizhen was arrested by the Fuzhou police while distributing Falun Gong leaflets in a local residential compound and subsequently denied access to her lawyer multiple times. Reports indicated that in September three Falun Gong members were arrested by Guangdong Province police while they were having a party at home. While one person was released, two others were sent to reeducation through labor camp. Other Falun Gong members were denied a fair trial. During the trial of Ye Guanghui in September, the court’s chief judge refused all requests to observe the trial and allowed only Ye’s lawyer to participate in the court session.

According to reports, in November authorities reduced the sentence of Church of the Almighty God member Lai Yiwa by six months, the first known act of clemency afforded to a Church of Almighty God member. Lai was sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in April 2013.

Falun Gong practitioner Wang Zhiwen continued to be held under house arrest after his October 2014 release from prison. Following his 15-year sentence for “cult-related” activities, Chinese authorities continued to deny him a passport so he could be reunited with family members overseas. He was reported to be in poor health and lacking adequate medical care.

The CCP continued to maintain a Leading Small Group for Preventing and Dealing with the Problem of Heretical Cults as well as an extralegal, CCP-run security apparatus known as “610” offices (named for the date of its creation on June 10, 1999) to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other “cult organizations.”

Human rights lawyers defending religious adherents were subject to harassment, detention, and professional pressure. On August 25, authorities in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, detained and placed under “residential surveillance” in an

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unspecified location Christian human rights lawyer Zhang Kai on suspicion of “gathering a crowd to disturb the social order” and leaking state secrets to foreign entities. Zhang had provided legal counsel to churches facing cross removals and church demolitions as part of Zhejiang Province's campaign against “illegal structures.” His legal assistants, Liu Peng and Fang Xiangui, and Pastor Huang Yizi were also detained. Authorities released Liu Peng, Fang Xiangui, and four pastors in mid-December. Zhang Kai, Huang Yizi, and several other pastors, however, remained in detention at unknown locations at the end of the year. Authorities denied multiple requests by lawyers and family members to see Zhang, and subjected his family members to harassment. Zhang was detained before a scheduled meeting with the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom during his visit to the region.

Authorities continued to restrict the movement and access to medical care of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who had defended religious groups including Christians and Falun Gong members, after his release from prison in August 2014. Gao reported that after his release, government agents continued to subject him to intrusive visits at home and deny him permission to travel for medical treatment. After detailing to a reporter the mistreatment he suffered while in prison, including beatings to his face with an electric baton, inadequate food rations, and years in solitary confinement, Gao was again detained by authorities on September 23 and released a day later.

The government did not renew the professional licenses of a number of attorneys who advocated for religious freedom, and it imprisoned other religious freedom activists or otherwise impeded their work on behalf of religious clients. Authorities also harassed or detained the family members, including children, of religious leaders and religious freedom activists.

In some parts of the country, authorities charged religious believers not affiliated with a patriotic religious association with various crimes, including “illegal religious activities” or “disrupting social stability.”

Chinese authorities frequently tightened security in advance of major Tibetan holidays and the birthday of the exiled Tibetan religious leader, the Dalai Lama. In a Tibetan region of Gansu Province in June, several hundred people held a ritual “blessing ceremony” which later drew truckloads of security forces and armed police, according to RFA. In March several hundred armed police and drones

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monitored a crowd in Gansu Province which gathered for the unveiling of a new religious painting.

The government did not recognize house churches and closely monitored their activities. Some officials maintained house churches did not exist, according to reports. Although SARA has said family and friends had the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government, authorities still regularly harassed and detained small groups that met for religious purposes in homes and other locations. Some house church members said they had more freedom than in the past to conduct religious services, as long as they gathered only in private and kept congregation numbers low. In some areas, however, authorities shut down churches that tried to maintain a low profile.

There were reports authorities applied indirect pressure on house churches to cease their activities. Some house churches reported authorities harassed and pressured their landlords to break property leases with the churches. Some house churches reported local government authorities shut down their services. In Guangdong Province, authorities shut down the services of unregistered Zhongfu Wumin Church repeatedly throughout the year. The pastor, Liu Peng, filed an appeal stating the Notice to Cease Illegal Religious Activities given to his church in August was unlawful under the country's constitution. Advocacy groups reported in August that the Shantou Municipal Religious Affairs Bureau closed Zhongfu Tonxin Church, a non-TSPM church in Guangdong Province, because of the church's contact with overseas media. In September authorities in Guangdong Province placed under house arrest members of the Guangfu House Church for attempting to travel to Beijing to protest church service shutdowns, raids, and property confiscation. In Sichuan Province, advocacy groups reported that police detained unregistered Langzhong House Church member Luo Guangwu in June for "participating in illegal activities" after leaving a church service.

Advocacy groups reported in June house church leaders Zhao Weiliang and Cheng Hongpeng in Cao County, Shandong Province, were found guilty of "using a cult to undermine law enforcement" and sentenced to four and three years in prison, respectively. The court ruled that Zhao and Cheng were organizers of the government-banned "cult" Full Scope Church, an affiliation that both denied. In Sichuan Province, police raided a house church and took away two women for questioning, saying the church was under investigation for being a "cult." The women were eventually allowed to return home but police notified the church that they were forbidden to continue meeting.

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Security officials frequently interrupted outdoor services of the unregistered Shouwang Church in Beijing and detained people attending those services for several days without charge. Reports indicated the average length of these detentions increased from hours to days. In October authorities subjected four members of the Shouwang Church to 10 days of administrative detention for “disturbing public order” after gathering to worship in public. Church Pastor Jin Tianming continued to be held under surveillance, according to reports from advocacy groups. Government officials continued to pressure prospective landlords against renting facilities to the Shouwang Church, which reportedly lost its leased building in 2011 due to government pressure.

In Xinjiang, the government continued to cite concerns over the three evils – “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” – as a reason to enact and enforce repressive measures against the religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities, according to human rights organizations. It remained difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those pursuing political goals, the right to worship, or criminal acts.

As in previous years, authorities in Xinjiang imposed strict controls on religious practice during Ramadan. The government barred government employees, teachers, professors, civil servants, and CCP members from fasting and attending religious services at mosques. Authorities ordered restaurants to remain open during Ramadan. The government sponsored beer festivals in Niya County, Hotan Prefecture, during Ramadan, reportedly to “dilute the religious atmosphere.” The festivals included beer drinking contests that featured cash prizes up to 1,000 RMB (\$154) for winners, according to media reports. There were also reports local government policy directives ordered Uighur shopkeepers in Kashgar and Hotan to stock alcohol and cigarettes during Ramadan. In July officials conducted visits to student dormitories in Qutubi County to ensure the students were not fasting during Ramadan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied international media reports stating Uighur Muslims were banned from Ramadan fasting, and maintained that Uighurs’ religious freedoms were guaranteed by the country’s constitution. Reports published on the official websites of local governments in Xinjiang, however, indicated authorities restricted certain groups of Uighurs from observing Ramadan,

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including CCP members, their relatives, students, and the employees of state-owned enterprises and state-run organizations, and hosted “atheist education events.”

The government sought the forcible return of Uighurs living outside the country, many of whom had sought asylum from religious persecution, according to human rights organizations. Uighurs continued to flee the country and refugee arrivals in Turkey were estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 in 2015, according to press reports. According to media reports, hundreds of Uighurs fled or attempted to flee to Southeast Asia. Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia reported an increase in migrants believed to be Uighurs. The government stated the Uighurs were criminals and not refugees, and some countries complied with the government’s requests for the forcible return of Uighur asylum seekers. Human rights organizations reported some Uighurs forcibly returned had disappeared or faced mistreatment and imprisonment. Authorities denied repeated requests from the international community to confirm independently the welfare of 109 Uighurs repatriated from Thailand on July 10. RFA reported authorities forced two Uighurs forcibly repatriated from Thailand to confess publicly and undergo two months of political education after their return to the country.

There was increased pressure in official campaigns in Xinjiang to dissuade women from wearing religious clothing and men from growing beards.

Local authorities in Hotan Prefecture introduced a new policy requiring mosque entry permits at the start of Ramadan in July in order to worship at local mosques. According to the policy, Uighur men over the age of 18 could only apply for an entrance permit for the mosque in their home village, restricting the ability of Uighur Muslims to worship outside of their local communities.

According to the Kashgar Prefecture government website, 58,000 ethnic minority CCP cadres, primarily Uighur, signed the “Four Nots” pledge, which stipulated that they and their family members would not wear religious dress, including *jilbabs* and veils for women and long beards for men; participate in religious activities; listen to or disseminate religious content and publications; and apply to or participate in the Hajj.

Local authorities in Turpan, Xinjiang, reportedly fined individuals for studying the Quran in unauthorized sessions, detained people for “illegal” religious activities or carrying “illegal” religious materials, and stationed security personnel in and

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around mosques to restrict attendance to local residents. Authorities reportedly hung Chinese flags on mosque walls in the direction of Mecca so prayers would be directed toward the flags. On March 24, officials in Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang, ordered some local villagers to watch as workers tore down the home of a man accused of hosting an underground school for Quranic studies, according to RFA.

The media reported Muslims could apply online or through local official Islamic associations to participate in the Hajj. According to media reports, more than 14,500 Muslim citizens participated in the Hajj, consistent with 2014 numbers. Pilgrims from Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan exceeded 1,000. More than 3,000 individuals from Xinjiang also participated. These figures included China Islamic Association and security officials sent to monitor Muslim citizens and prevent unauthorized pilgrimages. Uighur Muslims reported difficulties taking part in state-sanctioned Hajj travel due to their inability to obtain travel documents in a timely manner and difficulties in meeting criteria required for participation in the official Hajj program run by the China Islamic Association. The government prohibited Uighur Muslims from making private Hajj pilgrimages outside of the government-organized program. Uighurs allowed to attend the Hajj were reportedly forced to participate in political education every day. Ethnic and religious committee staff from across Xinjiang were sent to international airports in China in June and July to ensure Uighurs were not making private Hajj pilgrimages outside of government sanctioned programs, a government source reported.

Authorities continued their “patriotic education” campaign, which in part focused on preventing any illegal religious activities in Xinjiang and prioritizing Chinese language and culture over Uighur language and culture.

Hui Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces engaged in religious practice with less government interference than did Uighurs, according to local sources.

Authorities continued to restrict the free printing and distribution of religious materials. The government limited distribution of Bibles to CPA and TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops, and seminaries. Individuals could not order Bibles directly from publishing houses. Members of unregistered churches reported the supply and distribution of Bibles was inadequate, particularly in rural locations. According to a foreign Christian source, in the last 10 years an estimated 250 Christian bookstores and nine domestic TSPM/Chinese Christian Council publishers had opened in the country,

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but there were no independent domestic Christian publishers. Publishers noted that over the last year, the number of Christian titles that could be published annually had been severely limited, with only 20 new titles authorized as of October, a decrease from 80 in 2014. Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone applications, however, reported that the government did not generally censor such materials.

The People's High Court, Public Security Bureau, Bureau of Culture, and Bureau of Industry and Commerce in Xinjiang continued to implement restrictions on videos and audio recordings the government defined as promoting terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism. It was forbidden to disseminate such materials on the internet, social media, and online marketplaces. As part of these measures, the police randomly stopped individuals to check their mobile phones for any sensitive content. Many Uighurs subsequently opted to delete any religious content on their mobile devices, including Arabic audio files of Quran readings and photos featuring women in conservative religious dress, according to reports.

In June authorities sentenced Husen Imin to 10 years' imprisonment in Aksu Prefecture under the charge of "religious extremism" for reading from the Quran at his mother's funeral. Authorities convicted Husen of spreading "illegal religious materials" through his smartphone during a mass trial held in July and sentenced the 22-year-old to 15 years in jail in November.

Authorities often confiscated Bibles in raids on house churches.

There were reports that authorities restricted the acquisition or use of buildings for religious ceremonies and purposes.

Catholic groups also reported the forcible destruction of their buildings. In one of many examples, in May the Catholic House of Prayer in Baoding, Hebei Province, was demolished by authorities. When questioned about the destruction of churches, government officials typically claimed religious structures were not "up to local building codes."

Authorities in Zhejiang Province ordered the demolitions of several state-sanctioned Protestant and Catholic churches and the removal of over 1,500 crosses as part of the "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" campaign targeting "illegal" structures. Church pastors and congregants openly resisted the cross removals by forming human chains to protect buildings and replacing or

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reattaching crosses, resulting in repeated clashes and standoffs with police.

Advocacy groups said the church demolition and cross removals largely targeted churches affiliated with the TSPM and registered with the government. Christian communities reported many churches that were targeted had building permits and other official documents demonstrating their building had been approved by the proper authorities.

Authorities detained or harassed journalists reporting on actions against Catholics and other Christians in Zhejiang Province. Christian newspapers reported their websites were often shut down temporarily when trying to report on Zhejiang Province, and other journalists were physically prevented from reporting on cross demolitions in the region. Authorities detained and questioned Hong Kong journalist Jiang Yunnan in January for attempting to interview church leaders connected to the cross demolitions. In November advocacy organizations reported reporter Zan Aizong, who wrote extensively about cross removals, was detained on “suspicion of subverting state power.”

In December after months of harassment and threats, Guizhou Province officials arrested Living Stone Church Pastor Yang Hua on charges of possessing state secrets and took possession of his church’s meeting space in a downtown Guiyang office building, effectively closing the church, which was the largest house church in Guizhou.

Due to the difficulty of fulfilling registration requirements, many religious organizations either remain unregistered or registered as commercial enterprises. Unregistered groups reported they were vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by SARA, the Ministry of Public Security, and other party or government security organs. In parts of the country, local authorities allowed or at least did not interfere with the activities of some unregistered groups, according to reports. Officials in many large urban areas, for example, allowed services in unregistered places of worship provided they remained small in scale and did not disrupt “social stability.” In other areas, local officials punished the same activities by restricting events and meetings, confiscating and destroying property, physically assaulting and injuring participants, or imprisoning leaders and worshippers, according to reports. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations.

In Xinjiang, regulations forbade minors from participating in religious activities and imposed penalties on organizations and individuals who “organize, entice, or

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force” minors to participate in religious activities. There were widespread reports of prohibitions on children participating in religious activities in various localities throughout Xinjiang, but observers also reported seeing children in mosques and at Friday prayers in some areas. Xinjiang authorities prohibited children from attending Islamic schools or participating in religious activities, prompting many parents who wished to provide a religious education to use nonsanctioned religious teaching centers, often run by relatives and other trusted individuals. Xinjiang officials also banned Uighur Muslim youth under the age of 18 from attending mosque and discouraged parents from teaching religion to children at home. According to the Turpan municipal government website, in April the local government raided underground religious schools and detained more than 397 “wild imams,” defined as clergy illegally teaching religion, clergy who continued to preach after removal from their religious posts, and clergy violating state rules in their teachings. Xinjiang state media reported authorities forced Uighur imams in Kashgar to dance in the street en masse to the Mandarin pop song “Little Apple” and swear an oath that they would not teach religion to children.

The government continued to restrict religious education in institutions across the country. Islamic schools in Yunnan Province were reluctant to accept Uighur students out of concern they would bring unwanted attention from government authorities and negatively affect school operations, according to local sources. Kunming Islamic College, a government-affiliated seminary, posted an official announcement stating it primarily accepted students from Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces, as well as the Chongqing Special Municipality. Xinjiang was not listed in the announcement. Christians also reported restrictions on their ability to speak about their faith among university students.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning had to obtain the support of the official patriotic religious association. The government required students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and political issues were included in examinations of graduates of religious schools. Protestant representatives reported that in seminaries controlled by the TSPM, officials directed faculty to engage in “theological reconstruction” to make Protestant doctrine conform to socialism. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

Catholic groups reported that the government continued to prevent the Holy See from choosing bishops in accordance with Catholic teaching and tradition. The

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CPA, however, occasionally allowed the Vatican discreet input into the CPA's selection process for some bishops. An estimated 90 percent of CPA bishops have reconciled with the Vatican. In some locations, however, local authorities reportedly pressured unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See. Most of the Catholic bishops previously appointed by the government as CPA bishops later were elevated by the Vatican through apostolic mandates. In August Father Joseph Zhang Yinlin Anyang in Henan Province became the first Vatican- and government-approved Chinese bishop publicly ordained in three years, a move characterized as an "olive branch" toward the Holy See in Catholic media reports.

Officials continued to hold "anti-cult" education sessions and propaganda campaigns affecting school children and their families. Some officials required families to sign statements guaranteeing they would not take part in house churches and "cult organization" activities related to Falun Gong as a prerequisite for registering their children for school. The media reported government employees in Xinjiang were forced to sign guarantees they would refrain from religious or political expression. The penalty for not signing could be barring their children from entering university or being subject to administrative investigation.

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

Government policy continued to allow religious groups to engage in charitable work, although some religious leaders reported their groups were not allowed to share religious beliefs while conducting activities. Faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, were required to register with the government. The government did not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government required faith-based charities to obtain official co-sponsorship of the registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. These groups often were required to affiliate with one of the five patriotic religious associations.

Registered religious groups provided social services throughout the country, but were often restricted from including religious content when providing such

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services. Authorities allowed certain overseas faith-based aid groups to deliver services in coordination with local authorities and domestic groups. Some unregistered religious groups reported local authorities placed limits on their ability to provide social services. On June 20, 200 police in Shenzhen disguised as volunteers forcibly closed the Christian-operated Guan'ai Center shelter for homeless and disabled persons, according to media reports. This action followed orders from the Shenzhen government to the center to cease "illegal religious activity," including putting up a cross and possessing religious publications and materials. In other provinces, such as Hebei, some registered charitable religious groups reported a positive working relationship with their local religious affairs bureau officials, allowing them to engage in disaster relief and social service activities.

Religious minorities reported increased screening at airport and train station security checks. Many practicing Tibetan Buddhists, especially monks and nuns, were denied passports and therefore unable to travel freely.

Religious groups reported religious adherents were excluded from certain employment opportunities because the CCP controlled appointments to many positions in society, including state-owned enterprises, public schools and universities, and professional organizations. In September the CCP's United Front Work Department issued public rules reaffirming the longstanding ban on party members following a faith. This ban was also enforced at the local level, with Zhejiang Province officials announcing the need to prevent the "infiltration of Western hostile forces." State-run media reported that new applicants for party membership would be vetted for religious belief and party members found to have embraced or participated in religion would be required to "rectify" their beliefs.

Foreign residents belonging to religious groups not officially recognized by the government reported being permitted to worship although, according to policy, foreigners could not proselytize, conduct religious activities at unregistered venues, or conduct religious activities with local citizens at religious venues. In many cases, authorities prohibited citizens from attending the services of religious organizations permitted to operate for foreign residents. Authorities threatened that if photos of large church meetings at the Shekou International School in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province appeared on international social media sites, the church would lose the lease on its new meeting site. The church drew hundreds of local and foreign Christians for weekly worship services, according to reports.

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There were reported incidents of government interference with Falun Gong activities abroad. According to advocacy groups, government officials pressured venue managers and governments in a number of countries to limit the broadcast time of Falun Gong-associated radio stations and cancel, refuse to host, or delay dance performances by the Shen Yun Performing Arts Company, which is associated with Falun Gong.

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

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

In Xinjiang, tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese migrants continued, exacerbated by government policies discriminating against Uighurs. Many hospitals and businesses would not provide services to women wearing veils. Tensions also continued among ethnic and religious groups in Tibetan areas, particularly between Han Chinese and Tibetans, and, in some areas, between Tibetans and Hui Muslims.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers openly discriminated against religious believers. Some Protestant Christians reported employers terminated their employment due to their religious activities. A Christian lawyer in Zhejiang Province was fired by his employer due to his religious activities, according to media reports. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring, lost their positions, and were detained by authorities for praying in their workplaces. In some instances, landlords discriminated against potential tenants based on their religious beliefs. Some unregistered churches reported that their property leases were broken by landlords pressured by the government.

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

U.S. officials repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns and pressed for the expansion of religious freedom. The President reiterated the importance of religious freedom for all people, including for ethnic and religious minorities,

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during Chinese President's Xi Jinping's state visit to Washington in September. The President noted restrictions on churches during his discussions with President Xi. The Secretary of State raised religious freedom concerns, including the case of detained Christian lawyer Zhang Kai, during the release of the annual U.S. International Religious Freedom Report in October.

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, regularly urged government officials at the central and local levels to implement stronger protection for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Ambassador met with members of religious groups and religious freedom defenders and highlighted religious freedom in public speeches and private diplomacy with senior officials. In an official visit, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised religious freedom concerns in government meetings in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, and urged the government to abide by its own constitution in upholding the right of religious freedom. The Department of State, the embassy, and the consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including religious prisoners.

U.S. officials continued to meet regularly with academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. The Ambassador hosted events for religious leaders and practitioners to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society. The embassy supported a number of religious leaders and scholars to participate in exchange programs related to the role of religion and religious tolerance. The embassy arranged for the introduction of religious officials to members of U.S. religious communities and U.S. government agencies that engaged with those communities.

The embassy and consulates general actively engaged on religious freedom issues, regularly hosting events for the public to promote understanding and tolerance. The Guangzhou Consulate General hosted a number of speakers and conducted regular discussions on religious freedom issues. Highlights included a discussion in August on the role of the Supreme Court in safeguarding religious freedom in the United States.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On February 29, 2016, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the

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following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

### TIBET 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

#### Executive Summary

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The constitution of the People's Republic of China states citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" without defining "normal." In the TAR and other Tibetan areas, authorities engaged in widespread interference in religious practices, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. There were reports of death in prison, forced disappearance, physical abuse, prolonged detention without trial, and arrests of individuals due to their religious practices. Travel restrictions also hindered traditional religious practices. Repression increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, and the Dalai Lama's birthday, according to numerous sources. According to reports by journalists and nongovernmental organizations, seven Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, self-immolated. The government routinely denigrated the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists revere as their most important spiritual leader, and restricted the rights of Tibetans to venerate him and other religious leaders at temples and monasteries. The government blamed the "Dalai [Lama] Clique" or other outside forces and foreign media reporting for instigating the self-immolations and other protests against government practices. Authorities often justified their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by attributing to them separatist and pro-independence activities.

Some Tibetans encountered societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, or when traveling, according to multiple sources.

The U.S. government repeatedly pressed Chinese authorities at multiple levels to respect religious freedom for all faiths and to allow Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions. In his meetings with TAR government officials in May, the U.S. Ambassador emphasized the importance of individual expression of religious beliefs. In September at a joint press conference

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during the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Obama called on “Chinese authorities to preserve the religious and cultural identity of the Tibetan people, and to engage the Dalai Lama or his representatives.” In meetings with visiting senior Chinese officials in Washington, DC, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and the U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues raised U.S. government concerns about religious freedom in Tibet and urged China to comply with the freedoms guaranteed in China’s constitution. The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised religious freedom concerns in Tibet directly with central government officials during a visit to China in August. The Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor raised Tibet issues during a visit to Beijing in October. The U.S. government regularly raised individual cases and incidents with the Chinese government. Embassy and other U.S. officials urged the Chinese government to reexamine the policies that threaten Tibet’s distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity. While diplomatic access to the TAR remained tightly controlled, U.S. officials did see increased, although still tightly managed, access during the year, with authorities granting one visit by the U.S. Ambassador in May, a U.S. consular visit in November, and a separate congressional delegation visit in November.

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

According to official data from China’s most recent census in November 2010, 2,716,400 Tibetans make up 91 percent of the TAR’s total population. Some experts, however, believe the number of ethnic Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. Overall, official census data show Tibetans constitute 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within jurisdictions of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion, and very small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau. Scholars also estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include ethnic Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Daoism, Confucianism,

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traditional folk religions, or profess atheism; Hui Muslims; and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

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

#### Legal Framework

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

The government’s April white paper titled *Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide* states “the freedom of religious belief of various ethnic groups is respected and protected by the Constitution and the laws, with all religions and sects being treated equally,” and “no state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or disbelieve in, any religion.”

The government’s September white paper titled *On Successful Practice of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet* states “the central government and the local government of Tibet Autonomous Region have fully respected citizens’ right to freedom of religious belief, and given equal attention and protection to all religions and sects to ensure normal religious activities and religious beliefs are protected according to law.”

Regulations issued by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) codify government control over the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including reincarnate lamas. These regulations stipulate city governments and higher-level administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as a reincarnate. Provincial or higher-level governments must approve reincarnations, and the State Council has the right to deny the recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of

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reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The government maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Within the TAR, regulations issued by SARA assert state control over all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious venues, groups, and personnel. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The TAR government has the right to deny any individual's application to take up religious orders. The regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or county-level cities within the TAR to "practice their religion," engage in religious activities, study, or teach. Tibetan autonomous prefectures outside of the TAR have formulated similar regulations. TAR regulations also give the government formal control over the building and management of religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

At the national level, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee's Central Tibet Work Coordination Group, the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD), and the SARA are responsible for developing religious management policies, which are carried out with support from the "patriotic religious associations." At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and the Buddhist Association of China are required to coordinate implementation of religious policies in monasteries, and many have stationed party cadres and government officials, including public security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas.

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

### **Government Practices**

Across the Tibetan Plateau there were reports of death in prison, forced disappearance, physical abuse, prolonged detention and arbitrary arrest of people due to their religious practice, and restrictions on religious gatherings, according to media reporting and human rights organizations. Some Tibetans continued to

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engage in self-immolation as a protest against government policies. Human rights advocates stated that authorities used intimidation to compel acquiescence with government regulations and to attempt to reduce the likelihood of antigovernment demonstrations, thereby projecting an image of stability and the appearance of popular support. At various times monasteries were surrounded by security forces and security forces maintained a permanent presence at some monasteries. Police detained students, monks, laypersons, and others in many Tibetan areas who called for freedom, human rights, and religious liberty, or who expressed support for the Dalai Lama or solidarity with individuals who had self-immolated. Restrictions were particularly severe around politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events. Authorities scrutinized and sought to control monastic operations and restricted travel for religious purposes, according to human rights organizations.

Prominent Buddhist reincarnate lama and political prisoner Tenzin Delek Rinpoche died in prison July 12, after serving 13 years of a life sentence for allegedly setting off explosions and inciting separation of the state, according to CNN. Authorities denied requests from his family to return the body so traditional Tibetan Buddhist funeral rites could be conducted. Authorities allowed relatives and religious leaders to witness the cremation of his body but later forced family members to return his ashes, according to a Radio Free Asia (RFA) report.

The Chinese government did not disclose the location of the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Tibetan Buddhism's second-most prominent teacher after the Dalai Lama. Chinese authorities detained him in 1995 when he was six years old. His whereabouts remained unknown. In September a Chinese government official publicly stated that the now 26-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was "living a normal life, growing up healthily, and does not wish to be disturbed." Authorities ignored requests by international observers to visit Gedun Choekyi Nyima.

The government continued to insist Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's true reincarnation. Gyaltzen Norbu has been appointed to two political positions, as vice president of the Buddhist Association of China and as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars in the country, UFDW, and Religious Affairs Bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypeople, including government officials, to attend sessions presided over by Gyaltzen Norbu. When Gyaltzen Norbu visited Tibetan areas in Yunnan

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Province in late May, officials reportedly ordered monks and villagers to greet him.

Some Tibetans continued to engage in self-immolation as a protest against government policies. At least seven Tibetans, four women and three men, reportedly self-immolated, as compared to the 11 self-immolations reported in 2014 and the 26 self-immolations reported in 2013. Among the group were a monk and a nun. Yeshe Kandro, a nun, called for the long life of the Dalai Lama, for the Dalai Lama to be invited to Tibet, and for freedom for Tibet as she set herself on fire in April, according to a report by the International Campaign for Tibet. Some experts said the declining number of reported self-immolations was due to tightened controls by authorities. Local authorities prosecuted and imprisoned an unknown number of Tibetans whom authorities said had aided or instigated self-immolations, including family members and friends of the self-immolators, according to press reports. Authorities also reportedly took measures to limit news of self-immolations and other protests from spreading within Tibetan communities and beyond. In numerous cases, officials shut down or restricted local access to the internet and cellular phone services for this purpose, according to reports.

There were reports of authorities physically abusing individuals during detention or arrest. In June police in the TAR's Changdu (Chamdo) Prefecture detained monk Tashi Gyaltzen in a government building where he was "severely beaten up," according to an RFA report. Authorities later released Tashi Gyaltzen after questioning.

There were reports of the arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention of religious figures without criminal charges. In June Chinese authorities in Gansu Province arrested four monks from Labrang Monastery on unspecified charges, according to an RFA report. Their whereabouts remained unknown as of the end of the year. In addition, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, in November a court sentenced Lobsang Kelsang, a monk from Kirti Monastery, to three and a half years in prison. Public security officials detained him in March for carrying an image of the Dalai Lama through the main street of Sichuan's Aba (Ngaba) County and calling for freedom in Tibet.

Authorities arrested and sentenced to prison some individuals for possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama on their cell phones. Tsering Dhondup was arrested in Qinghai Province's Tongren (Rebkong) County for allegedly posting images of the

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Tibetan flag and the Dalai Lama to mark the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday on his account on *WeChat*, a popular Chinese messaging application, according to a June Tibet Post International report.

Limited access to information about prisoners made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of Tibetan prisoners of religious conscience, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered. The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China's Political Prisoner Database included records of 646 Tibetan political prisoners who had been detained by September 1, and who were presumed to remain detained or imprisoned. Of the 646 political prisoners, 635 were detained on or after March 10, 2008, the start of a wave of political protests that spread across the Tibetan areas of China. Tibetan Buddhist monks, nuns, and teachers made up 43 percent, or 275 cases, of the 635.

Although authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, including public manifestations of religious belief, they confined many religious activities to officially designated places of worship, often restricted or canceled religious festivals, at times forbade monks from traveling to villages to conduct religious ceremonies, and maintained tight control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypeople. The government suppressed religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent. During the month of July, when Tibetans celebrated the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday, local authorities told many monasteries and lay people not to celebrate or organize any public gatherings. According to media reports, Chinese authorities restricted celebrations of the Dalai Lama's birthday across the Tibetan Plateau. Chinese authorities prohibited a June horse race in Gansu Province because participants in the race were required to save the life of at least one animal and dedicate the act to the Dalai Lama's long life, according to a RFA report.

Authorities permitted some major religious gatherings at other times, however. For example, in June over 110,000 people attended a large religious gathering near Gansu Province's Labrang Monastery, according to a report by *Gansu Economic Daily News*, a state-controlled media outlet. In September tens of thousands of people were allowed to celebrate the Kalachakra ceremony, a Tibetan Buddhist ritual, at Qinghai Province's Kumbum Monastery.

Multiple sources reported open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, remained prohibited in almost all areas and officials, many of

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whom considered the images to be symbols of opposition to the CCP and local officials, had removed pictures of the Dalai Lama from monasteries and private homes during visits by senior officials. Despite the ban on images of the Dalai Lama, many Tibetans continued to own and privately display photos of the Dalai Lama in their homes, in lockets, and on cellular telephones.

The ability of Tibetans to display the Dalai Lama's picture varied regionally and with the political climate. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors saw pictures of the Dalai Lama prominently displayed in private homes, shops, and monasteries, although monks reported they would temporarily remove such photos during inspections by officials from the local Religious Affairs Bureau or other agencies.

The government also continued to ban pictures of Gedun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama.

The TAR government also continued to maintain tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared the relics, as well as religious buildings and institutions themselves, to be state property.

The government continued to exercise its authority over the approval of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and the supervision of their religious education. In addition, authorities closely supervised the education of many key young reincarnate lamas. In a deviation from traditional custom, government officials, rather than religious leaders, managed the selection of the reincarnate lamas' religious and lay tutors in the TAR and some other Tibetan areas. According to a June report by state-controlled media, 25 newly recognized reincarnate lamas attended a UFWD-organized "TAR Training Class for New Reincarnate Lamas" in Lhasa.

International media reported authorities attempted to exercise significant control over religious institutions. The government restricted the number of monks and nuns at many monasteries and nunneries and expelled monks and nuns from some monasteries and nunneries, according to media reports. According to an April white paper, there were 1,787 sites for religious activities, over 46,000 resident monks and nuns, and 358 "Living Buddhas" in Tibet. Government officials in Qinghai Province's Chenduo (Tridu) County expelled monks not officially registered at the Nyatso Zilkar Monastery, according to a June RFA report. Local authorities expelled 106 Tibetan Buddhist nuns from Jada Ganden Khachoeing

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convent in the TAR's Biru (Driru) County and demolished several residential buildings at the nunnery. Authorities stated the nuns did not possess the proper documents and exceeded the number of nuns that authorities permitted to live at the nunnery, according to an RFA report. In many areas, monks and nuns under the age of 18 were forced to leave their monasteries. In January Sichuan Province's Ganzi (Kardze) Prefecture issued regulations mandating the removal of all monks under the age of 18 from monasteries and Buddhist schools and required that all such monks receive "patriotic education." Monasteries and nunneries in some areas outside of the TAR routinely accepted minors and unregistered monks and nuns, including from distant areas. Tibet scholars stated the Chinese government's ban on minors entering monasteries and nunneries and restrictions on travel of monks and nuns threatened the traditional transmission and practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

Authorities often justified interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with "separatism" and pro-independence activities, as reported in state media. General affairs in TAR monasteries, which traditionally were managed by monks, were overseen by Monastery Management Committees and Monastic Government Working Groups, both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, together with a few government-approved monks. Since 2011, China has established such groups in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas.

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in the various committees and working groups remained restricted to "politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials." The TAR government also required all monasteries to fly the Chinese national flag. In April state media reported TAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo reiterating that Tibetan monasteries and nunneries were required to display prominently the national flag and the portraits of the five CCP leaders from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping.

Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments stationed CCP cadres in, and established police stations or security offices on the premises of, or adjacent to, many monasteries. For example, the TAR had more than 7,000 government cadres working in 1,787 monasteries, according to an August report on a government website. Security forces continued to block access to and from important monasteries during politically sensitive events and religious anniversaries. Heavy police presence within and surrounding some monasteries restricted the movement

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of monks ahead of the March anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising, as well as the July birthday of the Dalai Lama. Additionally, observers reported police set up overt camera surveillance inside many monasteries.

The traditional monastic system also suffered because many top Buddhist teachers remained in exile in India and elsewhere, and some of those who returned from India were not allowed to teach or lead their institutions. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Gyalwa Menri Trizin – all resided in exile. Authorities often hindered Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from delivering religious, educational, and medical services

Authorities also hindered Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from carrying out environmental protection, a traditional element of both religious and conservation practice. For example, in January authorities forced a monastery in Qinghai's Yushu (Yulshul) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture to cancel a workshop that taught Tibetan grammar, logic, and traditional sciences to local children. Authorities reportedly feared the workshop would create a sense of pride among the Tibetan children and an awareness of their distinctness from Chinese culture, according to *Phayul*, an exile-run online news portal. According to government policy, newly constructed government-subsidized housing units in Tibetan areas were located near county government seats or along major roads, with no nearby monasteries where resettled villagers could worship. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans viewed such measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

In addition to restricting foreign travel, authorities also continued to restrict travel by Tibetans inside China, particularly for Tibetans living outside the TAR who wished to visit the TAR during sensitive times, such as for religious pilgrimages in March and July. Buddhist clergy said the restrictions on movement hindered a key component of religious education within Tibetan Buddhism calling for nuns and monks to visit different monasteries and religious sites to receive specialized training from experts in Buddhist traditions. Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns stated these restrictions have damaged and fragmented the quality of monastic education. Many monks expelled from their TAR monasteries after the 2008 Lhasa riots still had not returned, and some reported they had been prevented from joining new monasteries.

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Tibetans continued to encounter difficulties in traveling to India for religious purposes. Many Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, sought to travel to India for religious purposes, including to seek audiences with the Dalai Lama, or to continue their studies with key Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders and teachers. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve the passport applications of Tibetans. This was particularly true for Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes to local officials, or after promising not to travel to India or to criticize Chinese policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. Numerous Tibetans in Qinghai and Sichuan provinces waited for up to five years before being allowed a passport, apparently without any explanation being given for the delay, according to Human Rights Watch. Some Tibetans attributed the passport restrictions to an official effort to hinder travel for religious purposes. There were instances in which authorities confiscated and cancelled passports previously issued to Tibetans.

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

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

The CCP continued to forbid its members from participating in religious activities despite reports that many Tibetan government officials and CCP members held religious beliefs. TAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo stated in November the Party would investigate government officials thought to violate party discipline, including by following the “Dalai Clique.” Chen said such violations would include following the Dalai Lama, renouncing religion in public while embracing it in private, failing to be faithful to the rhetoric and decisions of the CCP Central Committee, participating in “illegal organizations,” having an “incorrect view” of ethnicity, going on pilgrimage to India, and sending one’s children to study with

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Tibetans in exile. Twenty Tibetan officials in the TAR were punished during the first eight months of the year for violations of “political discipline,” according to Chen.

Government officials continued to denigrate the Dalai Lama publicly and accused the “Dalai Clique” and other outside forces of instigating Tibetan self-immolations and public protests, stating such acts were attempts to split China. Authorities in the TAR continued to prohibit the registration of children’s names that included parts of the Dalai Lama’s name or names included on a list blessed by the Dalai Lama.

“Patriotic education” campaigns, in which authorities forced monks and nuns to participate in “legal education,” denounce the Dalai Lama, study materials praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, were carried out at many monasteries and nunneries across the Tibetan Plateau, according to reports. Many monks and nuns continued to report that political activities mandated by the party and government, including “patriotic education” campaigns and “legal education” campaigns, detracted from their religious studies.

According to many observers, the continued requirement for implementation of “patriotic education,” coupled with continued controls over religious practice, including the permanent installation at many monasteries and nunneries of CCP and public security officials, were primary sources of grievance among Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns, and the impetus behind some of the self-immolations and protests. Senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements reached with local officials that resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolation as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries.

The government permitted a U.S. congressional delegation to visit the TAR in November.

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

Since ethnicity and religion are tightly intertwined for many Tibetan Buddhists, it was sometimes difficult to categorize incidents solely as ethnic or religious intolerance. Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported incidents in which they were denied hotel rooms, avoided by

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taxis, and/or discriminated against in employment opportunities or business transactions.

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

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

U.S. government officials, including the President, the Secretary of State, the U.S. Ambassador in Beijing, and the U.S. Consul General in Chengdu, continued the sustained and concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. officials at the most senior levels urged China to ease restrictions on religious freedom, including repressive policies in Tibetan areas. The U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom raised religious freedom concerns in Tibet directly with central government officials during a visit to China in August. U.S. officials repeatedly raised Tibetan religious freedom issues – such as the Chinese government's refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama – in public remarks and with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. In addition to raising systemic issues, such as passport issuance to Tibetans, U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination.

In September at a joint press conference during the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Obama called on “Chinese authorities to preserve the religious and cultural identity of the Tibetan people, and to engage the Dalai Lama or his representatives.”

U.S. diplomats maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom, although travel and other restrictions made it difficult to visit and communicate with these individuals. Although diplomatic access to the TAR remained tightly controlled, U.S. officials did see increased access during the year, with authorities granting one visit by the U.S. Ambassador in May, a U.S. consular visit in November, and a separate congressional delegation visit in November. Officials from the Embassy

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in Beijing and the Consulate General in Chengdu made several trips throughout the year to visit Tibetan monasteries and nunneries in Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces.

### HONG KONG 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

#### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), as well as other laws and policies, protects religious freedom. The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Religious groups are exempt from the legal requirement that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) register, and can apply for subsidies and concessionary terms to run schools and lease land. The government invites all religious groups to comment on whether proposed measures discriminate on the basis of religion. Some residents reported mainland authorities encroached on their religious outreach and engagement activities with mainland visitors and students.

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

The U.S. consulate general affirmed U.S. government interest in the full protection of freedom of religion in meetings with the government. Consulate general officers at all levels, including the Consul General, met regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 7.1 million (July 2015 estimate). The government's Information Services Department data notes that approximately 43 percent of the population practices some form of religion. The two most prevalent religions are Buddhism and Taoism, often observed in the same temple. According to government statistics, there are approximately 1.5 million Buddhists and Taoists; 480,000 Protestants; 379,000 Roman Catholics; 40,000 Hindus, 20,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); 10,000 Sikhs, and 5,000-6,000 Jews. Local Islamic groups state the HKSAR is also home to approximately 300,000 Muslims. Small communities of Bahai and Zoroastrians also reside in the HKSAR. Confucianism is widespread, and in some cases elements of Confucianism are practiced in conjunction with

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other belief systems. Human rights organizations estimate there are between 500 and 1,000 practitioners of Falun Gong.

There are approximately 50 Protestant denominations, including Anglican, Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong recognizes the pope and maintains links to the Vatican; the bishop of Hong Kong and his retired predecessor are the only Catholic cardinals in greater China.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

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

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

Religious groups are exempt from the legal requirement that NGOs register with the government. Religious groups are only required to register if they seek government benefits, such as tax-exempt status, rent subsidies, government or

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other professional development training, the use of government facilities, or a grant to provide social services. Applicants for registration must provide the name and purpose of the organization, identify its office-holders, and confirm the address of the principal place of business and any other premises owned or occupied by the organization. Religious groups may register as a society or tax-exempt organization as long as they have at least three members who hold valid HKSAR identity documents; the registration process normally takes about 12 working days. Falun Gong is not classified as a religious group under the law and must register if the group wishes to establish offices, collect dues from members, or have legal status.

The Basic Law allows private schools to provide religious education. The government offers funding to cover 90 percent of the budget of schools built and run by religious groups, should they seek such support. Government subsidized schools may not bar students based on religion, but they may provide religious instruction as part of their curriculum, which may be mandatory for all students. Teachers, however, may not discriminate against students on account of their religious beliefs. The public school curriculum mandates coursework on ethics and religious studies, with a focus on religious tolerance; the government's curriculum also includes elective modules on different world religions.

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

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

Procedures under the current law have resulted in the six largest religious groups in the HKSAR holding 60 seats on the approximately 1,200-member election committee tasked with nominating and voting for the region's chief executive. The groups represented are the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, the Hong Kong Christian Council (which represents Protestant denominations), the Hong Kong Taoist Association, the

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Confucian Academy, and the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. Many of these groups hold their own internal elections to determine which member(s) will hold seats on the election committee.

### **Government Practices**

In contrast to the previous year, Falun Gong practitioners did not report any incidents of discrimination. Falun Gong practitioners were regularly permitted to maintain information displays in high-traffic areas and conduct public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in mainland China. The lack of interference in public displays followed an October 2014 court decision that sustained government officials' actions in 2013 to remove several hundred Falun Gong banners from the streets, with the justification that the group failed to obtain requisite permissions before placing the displays, which is required for all posters regardless of content. The judge dismissed the Falun Gong application, noting the group had never applied for a poster permit. In that case the government only removed posters that had not obtained permits and continued to issue permits for Falun Gong posters without reference to their religious content.

Some religious leaders reported Mainland authorities harassed them during their visits to the Mainland. A Christian NGO stated mainland security agents blocked approximately 100 mainland citizens from traveling to Hong Kong to participate in religious meetings the group organized in March. One pastor from Hong Kong reported mainland authorities told him to cease his ministry to mainland students in Hong Kong.

The Home Affairs Bureau functioned as a liaison between religious groups and the government. The government invited all interested groups, including affected organizations or individuals, to provide views on whether proposed measures discriminate on the basis of religion.

Senior government leaders often participated in large-scale events held by religious organizations. For example, clergy from all major faiths led a prayer or recitation at a Remembrance Day Ceremony to pay respects to all who died during the two World Wars. HKSAR Government and Legislative Council representatives participated in Confucian and Buddhist commemorative activities, Taoist festivals, and other religious events.

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

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Members of the Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities participated in a range of social services open to all religious groups, including welfare, elder care, hospitals, publishing services, media and employment services, rehabilitation centers, youth and community service functions, and other charitable activities. Jewish leaders hosted public Holocaust awareness events.

Catholic and Protestant clergy from the HKSAR accepted invitations from state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations on the mainland to teach at religious institutions. There were also student exchanges between state-sanctioned religious groups on the Mainland and HKSAR-based religious groups.

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

Consulate general officers at all levels, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with HKSAR government representatives. Consulate general representatives met regularly with religious leaders, NGOs, and community representatives to receive reports about the status of religious freedom both in Hong Kong and in the Mainland.

The Consul General met with Buddhist, Taoist, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim leaders throughout the year to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance. In all these interactions, he discussed the work of Hong Kong's Colloquium of Religious Leaders, a local organization aimed at fostering interreligious dialogue and promoting tolerance. He also attended numerous events to commemorate the Holocaust. In each of these interactions, the Consul General voiced support for religious freedom and emphasized the importance of tolerance and community building.

The Consul General met frequently with leaders and members of the local Islamic community. Noting that Hong Kong is one of the only communities in the world in which Sunni and Shia Muslims regularly worship together, the Consul General discussed the community's contributions to the protection of religious freedom. In July he hosted an iftar at which he discussed the importance of religious freedom and cooperative activities to counter violent extremism, as well as the promotion of religious tolerance. In September, the Consul General visited the Ammar Mosque, where he and Islamic Community of Hong Kong leaders discussed the promotion of interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, and community engagement.

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Throughout the year, the Consul General marked all major Chinese traditional holidays through regular visits to the SAR's local Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist temples. The consulate general's coverage of his visits on social media platforms, which regularly included captions highlighting the importance of religious freedom, generated widespread local support.

The U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom visited in August and met with leaders of Catholic, Anglican, Sikh, Taoist, and Islamic organizations for discussions regarding practice of faith without restrictions. The Ambassador also met with local human rights organizations and NGOs to learn more about the freedom of religion in Hong Kong and the Mainland.

Other consulate general officials participated in Holocaust-related events and hosted religious leaders at prominent events.

### MACAU 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

#### Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) grants residents freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach and participate in religious activities in public, and to pursue religious education. The law also protects religious assemblies and the rights of religious organizations to run schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and to provide other social services. The Freedom of Religion and Worship Law states the government does not recognize a state religion, explicitly notes all religious denominations are equal before the law, and stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad.

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

The U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau engaged with government, religious, and civil society leaders on religious freedom. Consulate general staff stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with top Macau SAR government officials and civil society representatives.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

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The U.S. government estimates the total population at 593,000 (July 2015 estimate). The Government Information Bureau of the Macau SAR reported nearly 80 percent of the population practices Buddhism. There are approximately 30,000 Roman Catholics (of whom over half are foreign domestic workers and other expatriates) and more than 8,000 Protestants. Protestant denominations include the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian Churches. There are also evangelical groups and independent local nondenominational churches, some of which are affiliated with mainland churches. The government reports smaller religious groups include Bahais (estimated at 2,500 persons), Muslims (estimated at 400 persons), and Falun Gong practitioners (estimated at 50 persons).

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

#### **Legal Framework**

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

Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR, rather than the central government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), is charged with safeguarding religious freedom in the SAR. Religious groups coordinate their relations with coreligionists in the PRC through the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO). The CGLO also engages in dialogue with religious groups in the SAR.

The Basic Law’s provisions for the protection of religious freedom are further delineated in the Freedom of Religion and Worship Law, which states the Macau SAR government does not recognize a state religion and stipulates all religious denominations are equal before the law. The law further provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The law specifically guarantees religious organizations may run seminaries and

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schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and provide other social services. Schools run by religious organizations may provide religious education. The law also guarantees religious organizations the right to acquire, use, dispose of, and inherit property.

The law allows religious groups to register directly with the Identification Bureau. Applicants must supply their names, identification card numbers, and contact information, as well as the group's name and a copy of the group's charter to register. Registration is not required to conduct religious activities, and it does not automatically confer tax-exempt status or other advantages, though several religious groups reported they had tax exemptions for land use and business operation, enabling them to afford to fund charity work and operate schools.

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

### **Government Practices**

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

Religious groups can apply to media organizations and companies to use mass media (e.g., television or public radio) for religious purposes. No groups reported their applications were denied.

Some religious groups reported the CGLO supported their activities and exchanges with coreligionists in the mainland. Others said the government acknowledged and did not obstruct charity work conducted on the mainland.

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

Relations among the various religious groups were good according to sources across different denominations and affiliations, as well as civil society groups. Many religious groups, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Bahais, provided extensive social services available to anyone regardless of religious

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affiliation. Falun Gong members regularly set up informational sites in public venues without incident.

Public ceremonies and dedications often included prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

The private University of Saint Joseph (formerly the Macau Inter-University Institute), an affiliate of the Catholic University of Portugal, offered a Christian studies course that included Catholic seminary students from the mainland. The University of Macau's Philosophy and Religious Studies Program also accepted mainland students.

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

The U.S. consulate general affirmed U.S. government interest in the full protection of freedom of religion in meetings with the government and civil society leaders. Consulate general officers at all levels, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with top Macau SAR officials and civil society interlocutors.

The consulate general also worked with Hong Kong-based Islamic organizations in support of their activities to promote their ability to establish a house of worship in Macau.