

## SOUTH ASIA

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### AFGHANISTAN

For most of 2001, the Taliban, a Pashtun-dominated ultra-conservative Islamic movement, controlled approximately 90 percent of the country, including the capital of Kabul, and all major urban areas, except Faizabad. In 1997 the Taliban issued an edict renaming the country the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and named its leader, Mullah Omar, Head of State and Commander of the Faithful, granting him ultimate authority. Omar headed the inner Shura (Council), located in the southern city of Kandahar. Under the Taliban, freedom of religion was restricted severely. Until October 7, a rival regime, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (generally known as the Northern Alliance or United Front), which nominally was headed by former Afghanistan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, controlled about 10 percent of the country. Rabbani and his chief military commander, Ahmed Shah Masood, for most of the year, controlled the majority Tajik areas in the country's extreme northeast. On October 7, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), a U.S.-led coalition, began a military action aimed at toppling the Taliban regime and eliminating the al-Qaida terrorist network in Afghanistan. U.S. forces worked in concert with anti-Taliban forces of the Northern Alliance as well as others in southern Afghanistan. By mid-November the Taliban had been removed from power and had retreated from Kabul to southwestern Afghanistan. On December 5, 2001 a U.N.-sponsored Afghan peace conference in Bonn, Germany approved a broad agreement for the establishment of a 6-month interim authority (AIA) to govern the country. The AIA Chairman, Hamid Karzai, and his cabinet took office December 22.

Since December 22, 2001, the legal basis for religious freedom in country has been found in the December 5, 2001 Bonn Agreement and in the 1964 constitution. The 1964 constitution proclaims Islam the "sacred religion of Afghanistan" and states that religious rites of the state shall be performed according to Hanafi doctrine. The Constitution also proclaims that "non-Muslim citizens shall be free to perform their rituals within the limits determined by laws for public decency and public peace." The June 2002 Loya Jirga (or Grand Assembly of traditional leaders) declared that the official name of the country is the "Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan (ITGA)." A Constitutional Commission mandated by the Bonn agreement is to draft a new constitution during 2002. By the end of the period covered by this report, a new constitution had not been drafted.

There was significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Before the October 2001 collapse of the Taliban, repression by the Taliban of the Hazara ethnic group, which is predominantly Shi'a Muslim, was particularly severe. Although the conflict between the Hazaras and the Taliban was political and military as well as religious, and it was not possible to state with certainty that the Taliban engaged in its campaign against the Shi'a solely because of their religious beliefs, the religious affiliation of the Hazaras apparently was a significant factor leading to their repression. The Taliban sought to impose its interpretation of Islamic observances in areas that it controlled and declared that all Muslims in such areas must abide by the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban relied on a religious police force to enforce rules regarding appearance, dress, employment, behavior, religious practice, and freedom of expression and access to medical care. Persons who were found to be in violation of the edicts were subject to punishment meted out on the spot, which included beatings, detention, or both. In practice, the rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups affect adversely adherents of other branches of Islam and other faiths.

However, after the fall of the Taliban, the AIA and the ITGA stated publicly and began to pursue actively a policy of religious tolerance. The ITGA has faced opposition to a more open policy from a variety of sources, including Taliban remnants

that seek a return to the pre-October 2001 system. Problems with religious freedom still exist, however. According to Human Rights Watch, since the collapse of the Taliban regime in the northern part of the country, ethnic Pashtuns throughout the country have faced widespread abuses including killings, sexual violence, beatings, and extortion. Pashtuns reportedly are targeted because their ethnic group was closely associated with the Taliban regime. According to Human Rights Watch, soon after the Taliban collapsed, Pashtun communities quickly were disarmed across the northern part of the country and faced widespread abuses at the hands of the three ethnic militias and by armed Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras not affiliated with the militias.

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country are difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population.

Prior to the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom. However, since the December 2001, opening of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with Afghan officials in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

In October 2001, the Secretary of State identified the Taliban as a particularly severe violator of religious freedom.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 251,738 square miles and its population is approximately 26.8 million, according to UN agencies. Reliable data on the country's religious demography is not available; a census has not been taken in decades. However, observers estimate that 84 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim; approximately 15 percent is Shi'a Muslim; and other religions, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews make up less than 1 percent of the population. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam is growing.

Traditionally, Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the dominant religion. The Taliban also adhered to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, making it the dominant religion in the country for most of 2001. For the last 200 years, Sunnis often have looked to the example of the Deoband madrassah (religious school) near Delhi, India. Most of the Taliban leadership attended Deobandi-influenced seminaries in Pakistan. The Deoband school has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models established in the Koran and the customary practices of the Prophet Mohammed. Additionally, Deobandi scholars often have opposed what they perceive as Western influences. Much of the population adheres to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism, but a sizable minority adheres to a more mystical version of Sunnism generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Until October 7, a rival regime, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (generally known as the Northern Alliance or United Front), which nominally is headed by former Afghanistan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, controlled about 10 percent of the country. Rabbani and his former chief military commander, Ahmed Shah Masood, for most of 2001, controlled the majority Tajik areas in the country's extreme northeast. Other members of the Northern Alliance include ethnic Hazara, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and other smaller groups. Some other smaller ethnic groups are Shi'a Muslims. Within the respective factions, there are economic, political, and military advantages to belonging to the dominant faith or ethnic group in a given faction. Conversely, members of a different faith may encounter disadvantages if they seek full membership in a particular faction. The Taliban brought several prominent Shi'a commanders into its organization in an effort to counter the perception that it was an exclusively Sunni Pashtun movement. The Northern Alliance included several Pashtuns in prominent roles, although its supporters largely came from the non-Pashtun minorities.

In the past, small communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians lived in the country; however, most members of these communities have left. Even at their peak, these non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the country's small Hindu and Sikh population, which once numbered about 50,000 persons, emigrated or took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict. However, recently some minorities have begun to return. Non-Muslims such as Hindus and Sikhs are now estimated to number only in the hundreds.

Several areas of the country are religiously homogeneous. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, centered around the city of Kandahar, dominate the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat or the mountainous central highlands around Bamiyan. Badakshan province, in the extreme northeast of the country, traditionally had an Ismaili population. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, are more heterogeneous. For example, in and around the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, there is a mix of Sunnis (including Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (including Hazaras, Qizilbash, and Ismailis).

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

During the period covered by this report, there was no nationally recognized constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom. Under the Taliban religious freedom was restricted severely. After the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, there continued to be some limits on religious freedom. Due to the absence of a constitution and the two decades of civil war, religious freedom was determined primarily by the unofficial, unwritten, and evolving policies of the warring factions. Before the fall of the Taliban, in most parts of the country the Taliban vigorously enforced its interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban claimed in mid-1999 that it was drafting a new constitution, based upon the sources of Islamic religious law (Shari'a), the Koran, the Sunna, and Hanafi jurisprudence. Such a constitution was not promulgated before the fall of the Taliban. Custom and law required affiliation with some religion, and atheism is considered apostasy. Under the Taliban, apostasy was punishable by death. Proselytizing is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam; however, there were no laws forbidding proselytizing.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country has relied upon the Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution. Though the 1964 Constitution proclaims that Islam is the "sacred religion," it does not prohibit the practice of other religions. The constitutional commission mandated by the Bonn agreement is to draft a new constitution during 2002, and the new constitution is to provide for religious freedom. By the end of the period covered by this report, a new constitution had not been drafted.

Under the Taliban, the country's official name was the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan; however, according to the Northern Alliance, the umbrella organization of various smaller anti-Taliban groups, it was the Islamic State of Afghanistan. These names reflected the desire of both factions to promote Islam as the state religion. The June 2002 Loya Jirga declared that the official name of the government was the "Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan." The country itself is simply referred to as "Afghanistan."

The parts of the country's educational system that survived more than 20 years of war placed considerable emphasis on religion. According to international news reports in May 2001, the Taliban issued an edict requiring all students, including those in private schools, to wear head coverings. The Taliban reportedly ordered education centers to expel any student without a head covering or face the risk of closure by the religious police. However, since the fall of the Taliban, public school curricula have included religious subjects, but detailed religious study is conducted under the guidance of religious leaders. There is no restriction on parental religious teaching.

When the Taliban took Kabul in September 1996, it immediately issued pronouncements forbidding girls to go to school. According to a United Nations survey, at that time, more than 100,000 girls reportedly attended public school in Kabul from grades kindergarten to 12. From 1996 until its collapse the Taliban eliminated most of the opportunities for girls' education that existed in areas that the Taliban controlled; however, some girls' schools still operated in rural areas and small towns. The Taliban decreed that women were not allowed to attend the country's formerly coeducational universities, and one women's university, the Kabul branch of the Peshawar-based Afghan University, was closed by the Taliban in 1996. The ban on women working outside of the home reportedly also has hampered the education of boys, since 70 percent of the country's teachers were women before the Taliban took over most of the country. The new government has not repealed specific Taliban laws, considering instead that the entire Taliban system has been declared null and void.

The ITGA has proclaimed no official religious holidays.

The Government has undertaken interfaith efforts indirectly through the creation and empowerment of the Human Rights, Judicial, and Constitutional Commissions, all of which have the general aim of reconciliation at the national level.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Following the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, the Minister for Women's Affairs was charged by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court with "blasphemy," for having taken a prominent and vocal role as Deputy Chair of the Emergency Loya Jirga. This resulted from a political dispute between fundamentalist factions of Afghan society and modernist factions, symbolized by the Women's Minister, Dr. Sima Samar. The charges themselves emanated from the Chief Justice's interpretation of Shari'a law. The dispute was resolved politically through the personal intervention of President Karzai, and the charges were dropped. Dr. Samar is the Chair of the Human Rights Commission.

While some Taliban leaders claimed that the Taliban was tolerant of religious minorities, it reportedly imposed some restrictions upon Shi'a Muslims in Taliban-controlled territory. For example, the Taliban allegedly ordered Shi'a Muslims to confine their Ashura commemorations during the month of Muharram to their mosques and to avoid the public processions that are an integral part of Ashura in other countries with Shi'a populations. There also were unconfirmed reports that the Taliban occupied and "cleansed" Shi'a mosques for the use of Sunnis, including a Shi'a mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998.

Under the Taliban, conversion from Islam was considered apostasy and was punishable by death. There was no information available about converts, and no information available concerning restrictions on the training of clergy. Immigrants and non-citizens are free to practice their own religions. Since the fall of the Taliban, no political parties are banned or discouraged, other than the Taliban. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operate without interference.

Under the Taliban, prayer was mandatory for all, and those who were observed not praying at appointed times or who were late attending prayer were subject to punishment, including severe beatings. Friday noon prayers at mosques reportedly were compulsory for Muslim men. However, women and girls reportedly were forbidden to enter mosques and therefore had to pray at home. Before the fall of the Taliban, women were forbidden from participating in public life, including religious life, except in limited instances. Furthermore, the Taliban prohibited all doctors from treating female patients in the absence of a patient's husband, father, or brother. This decree, while not universally enforced, made treatment extremely difficult for Kabul's widows, many of whom had lost all their male family members.

On July 6, 2000, the Taliban issued an edict banning women's employment (except in the health care sector) in U.N. agencies and international NGO's. On August 16, 2000, the Taliban issued an order closing down the World Food Program's (WFP) 25 widows' bakeries. However, the Taliban reversed the edict the next day after the WFP stated that the female staff of the bakeries were not direct employees of the WFP and therefore not subject to the edict. In June 2001, the bakeries again were closed due to an impasse between the Taliban and the WFP over the WFP's attempt to hire women to conduct a beneficiary survey. A compromise was reached in which the Taliban permitted the WFP to hire women through the Ministry of Public Health and allowed the bakeries to reopen. Since the fall of the Taliban, there have been no such restrictions on women's movement or employment.

Under the Taliban, in public women were required to don a head-to-toe garment known as the burqa, which only has a mesh screen for vision. Most women in rural areas traditionally wore burqas; however, many urban women did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice. During the period covered by this report, the Taliban reportedly did ease some of the restrictions on women's dress. After the fall of the Taliban, women were no longer required to wear burqas, although many continue to choose to do so.

According to Taliban regulations, men's beards were required to protrude farther than would a fist clamped at the base of the chin. Men also needed to wear head coverings and could not have long hair. All students at Kabul University reportedly were required to have beards in order to study there. However, there have been no such restrictions on men's appearance since the fall of the Taliban.

In May 2001, according to news reports, the Taliban was considering an edict requiring Hindus to wear identifying badges on their clothing. On May 23, 2001, Taliban radio announced that the edict had been approved by religious officials; however, Mullah Omar reportedly did not sign the edict and the Taliban did not implement it before the regime fell. The Taliban stated that the intent of the proposed edict was to protect Hindu citizens from harassment by members of the religious police. However, international observers regarded the proposed edict as part of the Taliban's efforts to segregate and isolate non-Muslim citizens, and to encourage more Hindu migration. The reactions of Hindu citizens reportedly ranged from indifference to outrage.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

The Taliban reportedly had committed numerous human rights violations, particularly against the Hazaras. For example, in the recent past, the Taliban committed mass killings of the mainly Shi'a Hazaras particularly in the north. Although the conflict between the Hazaras and the Taliban was political and military as well as religious, and it is not possible to state with certainty that the Taliban engaged in its campaign of persecution against the Shi'a solely because of their religious beliefs, the religious affiliation of the Hazaras reportedly was a significant factor leading to their repression by the Taliban. In January 2001, several NGO's reported that the Taliban massacred several hundred Shi'a civilians in Yakaolang in the center of the country. The massacre reportedly occurred after the Taliban recaptured the area from opposition forces. According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch (HRW), after the Taliban recaptured the area, they rounded up victims from the surrounding villages, and shot or stabbed them with bayonets in the town center.

Although the conflict between the Pashtuns and other tribal sects was political and military as well as religious, it was not possible to state with certainty that ethnic tribes engaged in widespread violence solely because of their religious beliefs, although the religious affiliation of the Pashtuns apparently was a factor leading to their repression. In the period covered by this report, there were reports of widespread violence against ethnic Pashtuns, including extrajudicial killings, beatings, sexual violence, and destruction of property. This ongoing campaign of violence, according to HRW, has forced thousands of Pashtuns to leave their villages. These attacks are believed to be carried out in reprisal for perceived support given to the Taliban in the northern section of the country by local Pashtuns. The Taliban was dominated by Pashtuns from Kandahar and other southern provinces, and its forces were implicated in mass killings, destruction of homes, and other serious abuses against non-Pashtun communities in the north between 1997 and 2001.

The Taliban ruled strictly in areas that it controlled, establishing ad hoc and rudimentary judicial systems. The Taliban established Islamic courts to judge criminal cases and to resolve disputes. The courts reportedly dealt with all complaints, relying on the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and punishments as well as tribal customs. In cases involving murder and rape, convicted prisoners generally were ordered to be executed, although relatives of the victim could instead choose to accept another form of restitution. Decisions of the courts reportedly were final. Taliban courts imposed their extreme interpretation of Islamic law and punishments following swift summary trials. Murderers were subjected to public executions, which sometimes took place before crowds of up to 30,000 persons at Kabul Stadium. Executions sometimes were carried out by throat slitting, a punishment that, at times, was inflicted by the victims' families. Thieves were subjected to public amputations of either one hand or one foot, or both. The U.N. Special Rapporteur for Torture noted particular concern about the use of amputation as a form of punishment by Taliban authorities. Adulterers were stoned to death or publicly whipped with 100 lashes. According to HRW in 1999, several men who were found guilty of homosexual acts were crushed by having walls toppled over them by a tank; one man who survived the ordeal after being left under the rubble for two hours reportedly was allowed to go free. There were no reports that homosexuals were punished in such a manner during the period covered by this report.

The Taliban sought to impose its extreme interpretation of Islamic observance in any many areas as it could and declared that all Muslims in areas under its control had to abide by the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban announced its proclamations and edicts through broadcasts on the Taliban's "Radio Shariat," and relied on a religious police force under the control of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to enforce rules regarding appearance, dress, employment, access to medical care, behavior, religious practice, and freedom of expression. Members of the religious police, which was raised to the status of a Ministry in May 1998, were regularly supposed to check persons on the street in order to ascertain that individuals were conforming to such Taliban edicts. Persons found to be in violation of the edicts were subject to punishment meted out on the spot, which included beatings, detention, or both. In practice, the rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups affected adversely adherents of other forms of Islam and of other faiths. Enforcement of Taliban social strictures was erratic; Taliban edicts generally were enforced in cities, especially in Kabul, and were enforced less consistently in rural areas, where more was left to local custom.

The Taliban's extreme interpretation and implementation of Shari'a (Islamic law) had a particularly harmful effect on women. In Kabul and elsewhere, women found in public who were not wearing a burqa, or whose burqas did not cover their ankles

properly, frequently were beaten by members of the religious police. Some poor women could not afford the cost of a burqa, and thus were forced to remain at home or risk beatings if they went out without one. Some women who could not afford to buy burqas were unable to access necessary medical care. In a 1998 survey, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) found that 22 percent of the female respondents surveyed reported being detained and abused by the Taliban; of these incidents, 72 percent were related to alleged infractions of the Taliban's dress code for women. Most of these incidents reportedly resulted in detentions that lasted 1 hour or less, but 84 percent also resulted in public beatings, and 2 percent resulted in torture. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed reported that they had reduced their public activities drastically during 1998 in Kabul.

Due to religious interpretation imposed by the Taliban, women were expected to leave their homes only while escorted by a male relative, further curtailing the appearance and movement of women in public even while wearing approved clothing. Women who appeared in public without a male relative risked being beaten by members of the religious police. Women were not allowed to drive, and taxi drivers reportedly were beaten if they took unescorted women as passengers.

When the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, it immediately issued pronouncements forbidding women to work, including female doctors and nurses in hospitals. In a few cases, the Taliban had allowed women to work in health care occupations under restricted circumstances. Amnesty International reported that thousands of women around the country were laid off in April 2000. The prohibition on women working outside of the home was especially difficult for the large numbers of widows left by over 20 years of civil war; there were an estimated 30,000 widows in Kabul alone. Many women reportedly were reduced to selling all of their possessions and to begging to feed their families. Taliban gender restrictions also interfered with the delivery of humanitarian assistance to women and girls. Male relatives were required to obtain the permission of the religious police for female home-based employment.

Restrictions on women's employment also affected women working in international NGO's. In June 2001, the religious police arrested four female employees of the World Food Program because they were not accompanied by a male family member. The women were released after spending 2 nights in jail. Also in June 2001, an Italian-funded hospital in Kabul was forced to close temporarily to protect female staff from local religious police.

While most citizens lacked any access to adequate medical facilities, such access was made even more restrictive for women under the religious strictures imposed by Taliban rule.

The Taliban's religiously-based restrictions on medical treatment by male health professionals had a detrimental effect on children. According to PHR, children sometimes were denied medical care when the authorities did not let male doctors visit children's wards, which might be located within the women's ward of a hospital, or did not allow male doctors to see children who were accompanied only by their mothers.

In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed two giant pre-Islamic Buddha statues carved into cliffs in Bamiyan province, on the grounds that statues are idolatrous and insulting to Islam. The Taliban destroyed the 2,000-year-old statues despite appeals from the United Nations, international NGO's, and the world community, including many Muslim countries.

No information was available on the number of religious detainees or prisoners.

The Northern Alliance controlled much less territory than the Taliban and therefore affected a smaller percentage of the population. However, some groups within the Northern Alliance also were dedicated to enforcing strict adherence to Shari'a law. In past years, some members of the Northern Alliance were responsible for atrocities against Taliban forces during the war for control of the country.

The Ismaili community fought for the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and suffered when the Taliban occupied territories once held by Ismaili forces.

Under the Taliban, conversion from Islam was considered apostasy and punishable by death. According to a Taliban decree issued in June 2001, proselytizing by non-Muslims was prohibited, and was punishable by death or deportation in the case of foreigners. Taliban officials subsequently stated that the decree only was a guideline. A small number of foreign Christian groups were allowed in the country to provide humanitarian assistance; however, they were forbidden by the Taliban to proselytize. On August 3, 2001 Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer were arrested by the Taliban along with 22 others for their work with Shelter Now, a Christian aid organization based in Germany. The Taliban also seized Bibles and videos and audio tapes from the members of the group. The workers were tried for violating the Taliban prohibition against proselytizing. On November 15, 2001 Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer were freed by Operation Enduring Freedom forces, after the

Taliban had fled Kabul. In the period covered by this report, there was no information available about converts from Islam, and no information available concerning restrictions on the training of clergy.

*Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

*Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

The fall of the Taliban and the subsequent establishment of the AIA and the ITGA resulted in a major improvement in religious freedom. Sikh and Hindu representatives at the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002 reported that they no longer were repressed and felt free to practice their religions. Taliban policies and laws have been replaced by the Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution, and work on new laws and regulations under the Judicial and Constitutional Agreements mandated by the Bonn Agreement was to begin in 2002. The newly created Human Rights Commission is to address problems of bringing to justice those responsible for past abuses. The Government has stressed reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens during its existence both as an Interim and then as a Transitional Authority. Although the Government primarily is concerned with ethnic reconciliation, it also is concerned about religious tolerance. The AIA and ATA responded positively to all international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, the AIA had one Shi'a Hazara Vice President and four Shia Hazara ministers in the cabinet. In addition, within the current ITGA structure, Vice-President Khalili, Habiba Sarabi, Minister for Women's Affairs, and Dr. Sima Samar, the Chair of the Human Rights Commission are all Shi'a Hazara.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Most Shi'a Muslims are members of the Hazara ethnic group, which traditionally has been segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons. Throughout the country's history, there have been many examples of conflicts between the Hazaras and other citizens. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have acquired religious dimensions.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Until December 2001, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. This lack of diplomatic representation limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom. However, since October 2001, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with Afghan officials in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Since October 2001, the U.S. and international coalition forces have worked with Afghan opposition representatives to create the Bonn Agreement in December 2001 and thereby the Afghan Interim Authority. The U.S. has worked with the AIA and the subsequent ITGA in the months since to promote human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance, from the inclusion of minority groups in the Government and military to assistance in the reconstruction of the country and its legal and political processes. Embassy representatives meet daily with ITGA officials, and routinely with religious and minority figures, in an ongoing dialog regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction.

## BANGLADESH

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but also provides for the right—subject to law, public order, and morality—to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally respects this provision in practice. However, although the Government is secular, religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of the majority of its citizens.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Citizens generally are free to practice the religion of their choice; however, police, who generally are ineffective in upholding law and

order, often are slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crimes. An increase in crime and violence in the first few months after the October 2001 elections has exacerbated this situation and increased public perceptions of the vulnerability of religious minorities at large.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, the number of Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities who perceive discrimination from the Muslim majority has increased.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 53,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 130 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population are Hindu. The remainder of the population mainly are Christian (mostly Catholic) and Buddhist. Members of these faiths are found predominantly in the tribal (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although many other indigenous groups in various parts of the country are Christian as well. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their populations vary widely, from a few hundred up to 100,000 adherents for each faith. Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who do not participate actively in religious prayers or services; atheism is extremely rare.

There are no reliable estimates of the number of missionaries active in the country.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right—subject to law, public order, and morality—to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally respects this provision in practice; however, the number of Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists who perceive discrimination from the Muslim majority has increased.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Government; however, all nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), including religious organizations, are required to register with the NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government has the authority to cancel the registration of an NGO or to take other action against it; however, it rarely has used these powers, and they have not affected NGO's having religious affiliations.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differ slightly depending on the religion of the person involved. There are no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different faiths.

Religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of the majority of its citizens. Religion is taught in government schools, and parents have the right to have their children taught in their own religion; however, some claim that many Government-employed religious teachers of minority religions are neither members of the religion they are teaching nor qualified to teach it. Although transportation may not always be available for children to attend religion classes away from school, in practice schools with few religious minority students often work out arrangements with local churches or temples, which then direct religious studies outside school hours. The country celebrates holy days from the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths as national holidays.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

In April 2001, the Director General of the Islamic Foundation, a government organization dedicated to promoting Islamic culture and studies, forced Maulana Obaidul Haque, Khatib (chief clergyman) of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, to retire. The Director General appointed a new Khatib, but after filed a writ petition to protest his forced retirement, the court stayed the decision. A newly appointed Director General of the Islamic Foundation has come to an understanding with Haque, who withdrew his court case in late 2001; the retirement order also was withdrawn, and Haque remains Khatib of the National Mosque.

In January 2001, the High Court ruled illegal all fatwas, or expert opinions on Islamic law. Fatwas can include the decision as to when a holiday is to begin based upon the sighting of the moon, or an opinion on a religious issue. Fatwas also commonly deal with marriage and divorce, or mete out punishments for perceived moral



transgressions. Islam dictates that only those Muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa. However, in practice village religious leaders sometimes make declarations in individual cases, calling the declaration a fatwa. Sometimes this results in extrajudicial punishments, often against women for their perceived moral transgressions. While the court's intention was to end the extrajudicial enforcement of fatwas or other declarations by religious leaders, the ruling declared all fatwas illegal, and resulted in violent public protests (see Section III). Several weeks later, the Appellate Court stayed the High Court's ruling.

Foreign missionaries may work in the country; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam to other religions. Foreign missionaries often face delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In the past, some missionaries who were perceived to be converting Muslims to other faiths subsequently were unable to renew their visas, which must be renewed annually. In mid-2001 the Department of Immigration and Passports began to issue regularly a new visa category for foreign missionaries working in the country. The processing of the new visas apparently created complications initially; however, there were no recent reports of any current problems with receiving these visas.

There are no financial penalties imposed on the basis of religious beliefs; however, religious minorities are disadvantaged in practice in such areas as access to jobs in government or the military, and in political office. The Government has appointed some Hindus to senior civil service positions, and some recent promotion lists from the Ministry of the Establishment included from 3 to 7 percent Hindus and other minorities. However, religious minorities remain underrepresented in government jobs, especially at the higher levels of the civil and foreign services. The government-owned Bangladesh Bank employs approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Hindus dominate the teaching profession, particularly at the high school and university levels. Some Hindus report that Muslims tend to favor Hindus in some professions, for example, doctors, lawyers, and accountants. They attribute this to the education that the British offered during the 19th century, which Muslims boycotted but Hindus embraced. Employees are not required to disclose their religion, but religion generally can be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination in the application of the law, especially under the now-defunct Vested Property Act. The Act was a Pakistan-era law that allowed "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands to be expropriated by the Government. Approximately 2.5 million acres of land were seized from Hindus, and almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country were affected. Property ownership, particularly among Hindus, has been a contentious issue since partition in 1947. However, in April 2001, Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Bill. This law stipulated that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remain resident citizens. Hindus who fled to India and resettled there are not eligible to have their land returned, and the Act does not provide for compensation for or return of properties that the Government has sold. By law, the Government was required to publish a list of vested property holdings by October 11, 2001; however, by it had not published the list in the official Gazette by the end of the period covered by this report. In early 2002, the Ministry of Land forwarded a proposal to amend Section 9 of the law to extend the time for Gazette notification. The Government has not taken any further action regarding the law.

Under the 1961 Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives do, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Men are permitted to have up to four wives, although society strongly discourages polygamy and it rarely is practiced. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. Marriages in rural areas sometimes are not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his ex-wife alimony for 3 months, but this not always is enforced.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

Local gang leaders sometimes attack religious minorities, perceiving them to be weak and vulnerable. The law and order situation has deteriorated after the October 2001 national elections, and reports from the media, the main opposition party, and some NGOs have alleged that religious minorities have been targeted for attacks. In December 2001, Amnesty International issued a report claiming that Hindus and other religious minorities were attacked since the general election, allegedly

by supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led coalition, and the Government had done little to investigate these reports. However, many such reports have not been verified independently. The BNP acknowledged reports of atrocities committed between Muslims and Hindus during the period covered by this report; however, the BNP claimed that they were exaggerated. The Home Minister was unable to confirm reports that Hindus had fled the country and insisted that there was no link between religion and the violence. He also dismissed allegations that the BNP was linked to the perpetrators. The Government decided to set up a special Secretaries' committee to investigate the harassment of Hindus.

On November 16, 2001, Principal Gopal Krishna Muhuri of Nazirhat College in Chittagong was killed by unidentified assailants. Following the killing, Hindus staged a violent demonstration, protesting that Muhuri was killed because he was a Hindu. Muhuri's family stated that he was unpopular with the Jammati-Islami party as he refused it and other political parties access to the college's campus. It is unclear whether the killing was connected to the attacks against Hindus after the October 2001 elections. Two professors at the same college were arrested in connection with the killing and since have been released on bail. In July 2002 the police also arrested three known criminals for involvement in the killing. On April 22, 2002, a monk, Ganojyoti Mohasthobir, was killed at a Buddhist temple and orphanage at Rauzan in Chittagong. According to media reports, his killing was related to a land dispute. Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Foreign Minister Morshed Khan visited the temple after the killing. On April 28, 2002, Madan Gopal, a Hindu priest, was stabbed to death by a criminal gang at Radha Madan Asram in Khagrachhari. The criminals also looted gold statues from the temple. Newspaper reports quoted temple authorities as saying that the killing of the priest was a result of the assailants' failed attempt at extortion. On May 12, 2002, 12 unidentified persons broke the lock and opened the main gate of Dabua Benubon Bihar Buddhist Monastery at Beltoli before inmates and local residents chased them away. Using a compilation of newspaper reports, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (The Law and Arbitration Center), a human rights NGO, filed a writ petition with the High Court asking that the Government be ordered to investigate the incidents reported in the newspapers and to submit its findings to the court. The Government reportedly has completed its investigations, but has yet to submit its report.

In June 2001, in Baniachar, Gopalganj district, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church during Sunday Mass, killing 10 persons and injuring 20 others. The army arrived to investigate approximately 10 hours after the blast. The bomb, which the army concluded was produced outside of the country, had been placed just inside a side door in a jute bag. Police detained various persons for questioning, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the police reported no progress on the case. However, a judicial commission was formed in December 2001 to investigate the Baniachar bombing. This commission is comprised of three members, including a retired Supreme Court justice and two high ranking government officials. The commission's report on the bombing had not been released by the end of the period covered by this report. However, in prior years, the Government sometimes has failed to criticize, investigate, and prosecute the perpetrators of attacks on members of religious minorities.

The latest book by Taslima Nasrean, a feminist author who has received death threats and had a bounty issued for her death, was banned in 1999. She remained abroad during the period covered by this report, after receiving bail, while criminal and civil cases against her for insulting religious beliefs remained pending. There were no new developments in these cases during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the religious communities generally are amicable. Persons who practice different religions often join each other's festivals and celebrations, such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practice their faith without interference from Sunnis. Nevertheless, clashes between religious groups occasionally occur. In recent years, there have been cases of violence directed against religious minority communities that have resulted in the loss of lives and property. Police, who generally are ineffective in upholding law and order, often are slow to assist in such cases, thereby perpetuating an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence (see Section II). In the past,

intercommunal violence caused many Hindus to emigrate to India, but recent emigration of Hindus has decreased significantly and generally can be attributed to economic or family reasons. Nevertheless, incidents of communal violence continue to occur.

Newspapers reported attacks on Hindu homes and rapes of Hindu women at several places in the country soon after the October 2001 election. According to a human rights organization, at least 10 Hindu women were raped and a number of Hindu homes were looted by low-level BNP workers a few days before the BNP took power from the non-partisan caretaker government that supervised the election. Some incidents of rape and looting also took place in the southwestern district of Bagerhat. The situation improved after the new government members visited the areas and deployed additional police to troubled locations.

On October 6, 2000, in Gazipur, two boys and one woman were injured in an altercation between Hindus and Muslims. Muslims conducting Friday prayers asked Hindus to lower the music volume at a nearby Hindu festival. When the Hindus refused, Muslims from the mosque damaged a Hindu deity, leading to the violence and injuries. This altercation was resolved through dialog between community leaders. On October 8, 2000, in Dinajpur, four Muslims set fire to a Hindu temple over a land dispute with the Hindu temple's manager.

In the past, members of the Ahmadi sect, whom many mainstream Muslims consider heretical, were the target of attacks and harassment. In 1999 several mosques belonging to the sect were attacked. In October 1999, a bomb killed six Ahmadis who were attending Friday prayers at their mosque in Khulna. The only suspect questioned by police was a fellow Ahmadi who later was released. No other suspects have been questioned, and the case remains unresolved. In November 1999, Sunni Muslims ransacked an Ahmadi mosque near Natore, in the western part of the country. In subsequent clashes between Ahmadis and Sunnis, 35 persons were injured.

Ahmadis regained control of their mosque and filed a criminal case against 30 persons allegedly responsible for the conflict. That case remains pending. After a January 1999 attack on an Ahmadi mosque in Kushtia, two police officials were disciplined for failing to discharge their duties in controlling the incident. Ahmadi leaders report that their mosque remains under the control of local police, and that Ahmadis have been unable to worship since the January 1999 attack. As of the end of the period covered by this report, Ahmadis remained unable to worship at the mosque in Kushtia.

Public reaction to the High Court's January 2001 ruling that declared fatwas to be illegal resulted in violence. Following the court's decision, a number of NGO's organized a rally in Dhaka and transported busloads of persons, mostly women, from all parts of the country to express support for the ruling, which they said was a victory for women and for all who suffered abuses in the name of fatwa. However, Muslim groups contended that fatwa was an integral part of a Muslim's daily life and called the ruling an attack on their religious freedom. Islamic groups organized blockades to prevent buses from entering Dhaka for the rally, and protested the ruling and the NGO rally. In the ensuing violence, a police officer was killed inside a mosque, and an NGO office was ransacked.

Some members of the Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities continue to perceive and experience discrimination from the Muslim majority.

The law permits citizens to proselytize; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam to other religions. Moreover, strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by Christian groups are aimed at serving communities that have been Christian for several generations or longer.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy maintains a dialog with government, religious, and minority community representatives to promote religious freedom and to discuss problems. On an informal basis, the Embassy also has assisted some U.S. Christian-affiliated relief organizations in guiding paperwork for schools and other projects through government channels. The Government has been receptive to discussion of such subjects and generally helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy is encouraging the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders, which provides course work for religious leaders on human rights, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality issues.

## BHUTAN

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limits this right in practice. The Drukpa discipline of the Kagyupa school, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, is the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Societal pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms is prevalent.

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Bhutan; however, the U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government informally in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 18,146 square miles. Population figures vary greatly and estimates range from 600,000 to 2 million. Dissidents living outside of the country contend that the Government underreports the number of ethnic Nepalese in the country. Approximately two-thirds to three-fourths of the declared population practice either Drukpa Kagyupa or Nyingmapa Buddhism. The Drukpa discipline is practiced predominantly in the western and central parts of the country, although there are adherents in other parts of the country. The inhabitants of the western and central parts of the country mainly, but not exclusively, are ethnic Ngalops, the descendants of Tibetan immigrants who predominate in government and the civil service and whose cultural norms and dress have been declared by the monarchy to be the standard for all citizens.

The Nyingmapa school of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced predominantly in the eastern part of the country, although there are adherents in other parts of the country, including the royal family. Most of those living in the east are ethnic Sharchops, the descendants of those thought to be the country's original inhabitants. Several Sharchops hold high positions in the Government, the National Assembly, and the court system.

There is a tradition of respect among many citizens for the teachings of an animist and shamanistic faith called Bon. The arrival of this faith to the country predates that of Buddhism. Bon priests still can be found in the country, but it is unclear how many citizens adhere to this faith. Bon rituals sometimes are included in the observance of Buddhist festivals.

Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, are present in small numbers throughout the country. There is only one Christian church building in the country, in the south, where the only concentration of Christians sufficiently large to sustain a church building is located. Elsewhere families and individuals practice their religion at home.

Approximately one-fourth to one-third of the population, ethnic Nepalese who live mainly in the south, practice Hinduism. The Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ghanapath, Pauranic, and Vedic schools are represented among Hindus.

### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The law provides for freedom of religion; however the Government limits this right in practice. Proselytization is illegal, and dissidents living outside the country claim that the Government prohibits conversions. Dissidents also contend that Buddhist texts are the only printed religious materials permitted to enter the country. The Government vehemently denies both dissident claims, and asserts that any citizen is free to practice openly any religion.

The Government subsidizes monasteries and shrines of the Drukpa discipline and provides aid to approximately one-third of the Kingdom's 12,000 monks. By statute 10 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly, and 2 seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council, are reserved for monks of the Drukpa discipline.

Religious communities must secure government licenses before constructing new places of worship, but there were no reports to suggest that this process was not impartial. The Government provides financial assistance for the construction of Drukpa Kagyupa and Nyingmapa Buddhist temples and shrines. Monks and monasteries of the Nyingmapa school also receive some state funding. The Government provides some funding for the construction of new Hindu temples and centers of Sanskrit and Hindu learning and for the renovation of existing temples and places of learning. The Government also provides some scholarships for Sanskrit studies in Hindu universities in India.

According to dissidents living outside of the country, Buddhist religious teaching, of both the Drukpa Kagyupa and the Ningmapa disciplines, is permitted in schools. However, the teaching of other religious traditions is not. The Government contends that Buddhist teaching only is permitted in monastic schools, and that religious teaching of any kind is not permitted in other schools.

The King has declared major Hindu festivals to be national holidays, and the royal family participates in them.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Dissidents claim that the Government prohibits religious conversions. However, international Christian relief organizations and Jesuit priests are active in education and humanitarian activities.

Dissidents allege that the Government restricts the import of printed religious matter; only Buddhist religious texts are allowed to enter.

Certain civil servants, regardless of religion, are required to take an oath of allegiance to the King, the country, and the people. The oath does not have religious content, but a Buddhist lama administers it. Dissidents allege that applicants for Government services are asked their religion before services are rendered.

#### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

There have been reports in the past that police have used unwarranted lethal force on peaceful demonstrations, resulting in the death of at least one monk. Monks also reportedly have been tortured while in prison.

Ethnic Nepalese in the country were subject to discrimination by the authorities in the late 1980s and early 1990s when many were driven from their homes and forcibly expelled from the country. The root causes of this official discrimination and the expulsions were cultural, economic, and political; however, to the degree that their Hinduism identified them as members of the ethnic Nepalese minority, religion was also a factor. The Government contends that many of those expelled in 1991 were illegal immigrants who had no right to citizenship or residency in the country. Some 98,000 ethnic Nepalese continue to live in refugee camps in eastern Nepal and are seeking to return to their homes in Bhutan. An estimated 15,000 more reside outside of the camps in the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal.

In March 2001, the long-negotiated Nepal-Bhutan joint verification team (JVT) began working on the first of the refugee camps to determine which refugees would be considered genuine Bhutanese citizens and eventually allowed to return home. The Government claims that the process has "verified" more than 12,000 persons as of December 2001; however, the JVT has announced no results and no timetable for doing so. No plans for repatriation of the verified Bhutanese citizens have been made public.

The Government also began a program of resettling Buddhist citizens from other parts of the country on land in the south vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese now living in refugee camps in Nepal. Human rights groups maintain that this action prejudices any eventual negotiated return of the refugees to the country. The Government maintains that this is not its first resettlement program and that citizens who are ethnic Nepalese from the south sometimes are resettled on land in other parts of the country. The motivation for this official discrimination appears to be economic and political; however, to the degree that the Hinduism of the ethnic Nepalese identifies them, religion is also a factor.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Governmental discrimination against ethnic Nepalese in the late 1980's and early 1990's arose in part from a desire to preserve the country's Buddhist culture from the growth of the ethnic Nepalese population, with its different cultural and religious traditions. That preoccupation on the part of the Government and many Buddhists still is present today. It is reflected in official and societal efforts to impose the dress and cultural norms of the Ngalop ethnic group on all citizens. While there are no known reports of the repetition of the excesses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, societal and governmental pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms is prevalent. The failure of the Government to permit the return of ethnic Nepalese refugees has tended to reinforce societal prejudices against this group, as has the Government's policy on forced retirement of refugee family members in gov-

ernment service and the resettlement of Buddhists on land vacated by expelled ethnic Nepalese in the south.

Some of the country's few Christians, mostly ethnic Nepalese living in the south, state that they are subject to harassment and discrimination by the Government, local authorities, and non-Christian citizens.

There have been some efforts at promoting interfaith understanding. There are regular exchanges between monks of the two schools of Buddhism represented in the country. The King's example of making Hindu festivals official holidays and observing them also has had a positive impact on citizens' attitudes.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Bhutan. Informal contacts between the two governments ranging from the level of cabinet secretary to that of embassy officer occasionally take place. During these exchanges, governmental discrimination against the ethnic Nepalese minority has been discussed. The United States Ambassador to India discussed the refugee issue with the King and other senior members of the Government when he visited the country in April 2002.

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### INDIA

The Constitution provides for secular government and the protection of religious freedom, and the central Government generally respects these provisions in practice; however, it sometimes does not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure results in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country's federal structure, and in part from the law enforcement and justice systems, which at times are ineffective. The ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities is interpreted by some extremist elements as a signal that such violence likely is to go unpunished.

There was no overall change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, there was significant Hindu-Muslim violence during the period covered by this report. The country is a secular state in which all faiths generally enjoy freedom of worship. Central government policy does not favor any religious group; however, governments at state and local levels only partially respect religious freedom. The central Government is led by a coalition called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which has pledged to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance. However, the leading party in the coalition is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu extremist groups that have been implicated in violent acts against Christians and Muslims. The BJP also leads state governments in Goa, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh. Human rights groups and others have suggested that the authorities in Gujarat have not responded adequately to acts of violence against religious minorities by Hindu extremist groups, due at least in part to the links between these groups and the BJP. These groups have noted that the ineffective investigation and prosecution of such incidents may encourage violent actions by extremist groups.

Tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and between Hindus and Christians, continued during the period covered by this report. Attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states, which brought into question the Government's ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence. The worst religious violence during the period covered by this report was directed against Muslims by Hindus in Gujarat. It was alleged widely that the police and state government in Gujarat did little to stop the violence promptly, and at times even encouraged or assisted rioting mobs. Violence and discrimination against Muslims and Christians continued in other parts of the country as well.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 1.3 million square miles and a population of slightly more than one billion. According to the latest government estimates, Hindus constitute an estimated 81 percent of the population, Muslims 12 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 2.0 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, less than 2 percent. Hinduism has a large number of branches, including the Sanatan and Arya Samaj groups. Slightly

more than 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Buddhists include followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools, and there are both Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally are included among Hindus, often practice traditional indigenous religions. Hindus and Muslims are spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, and Muslims are a majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christian concentrations are found in the northeastern states, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states have large Christian majorities—Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Over the years, many lower caste Hindus, Dalits (formerly called “untouchables”—see Section II) and other non-Hindu tribal groups have converted to other faiths because they viewed conversion as a means to achieve higher social status. However, lower caste and Dalit converts continue to be viewed by both their coreligionists and by Hindus through the prism of caste. Converts are regarded widely as belonging to the caste of their ancestors, and caste identity, whether or not acknowledged by a person's own religion, has an impact on marriage prospects, social status, and economic opportunity.

There are a number of immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, who practice various religions. Immigrants from Bangladesh usually reside near the border area.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there are approximately 1,100 registered foreign missionaries in the country (see Section II).

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the central Government generally respects this right in practice; however, state and local governments only partially respect this freedom. There are no registration requirements for religious groups. Legally mandated benefits are assigned to certain groups, including some groups defined by their religion. The Government is empowered to ban a religious organization if it has provoked intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which restricts funding from abroad.

The country's political system is federal in character, under which state governments have exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and maintaining order, which has limited the central Government's capacity to deal with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), must receive a state government's permission before investigating a crime in that state. However, the federal government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, authorities have stepped in to maintain order.

There are many religions and a large variety of denominations, groups, and subgroups in the country, but Hinduism is the dominant religion. Under the Constitution, the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are considered different from the Hindu religion, but the Constitution often is interpreted as defining Hinduism to include those faiths. This interpretation has been a contentious issue, particularly for the Sikh community.

The legal system accommodates minority religions' personal status laws; there are different personal status laws for different religious communities. Religion-specific laws pertain in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. For example, Muslim personal status law governs many noncriminal matters involving Muslims, including family law, inheritance, and divorce. Hindu groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) are pushing for a uniform civil code that would treat members of all religions alike.

The Government permits private religious schools, which can offer religious instruction, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. Some Hindus believe that this disadvantages them since Muslims have many private religious schools (madrassahs), but Hindus mostly attend government or Christian schools. Many Christian schools minimize overt religious instruction to avoid retaliation from Hindu extremists.

Some Government officials continue to advocate “saffronizing,” or raising the profile of Hindu cultural norms and views in public education, which has prompted criticism from minority leaders, opposition politicians, academics, and advocates of secular values. During the period covered by this report, the Government announced its decision to rewrite existing National Council of Educational Research and Train-

ing (NCERT) history textbooks. The Government justified its decision by asserting that “history needs to be presented in a more refreshing and cogent manner.” In December 2001, the Human Resource Development Ministry made changes to chapters on Jainism in a textbook on ancient India without previously informing the author.

Some major religious holidays celebrated by various groups are considered national holidays, including Christmas (Christian), Eid (Muslim), Guru Nanak’s Birthday (Sikh), and Holi (Hindu).

The central Government is conscious of the perception that because of the composition of its support base it is less likely to respond to acts of violence against religious minorities by Hindu extremist groups. It has made efforts to show that it is addressing the concerns of religious minorities who believe that they are threatened.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have appointed members and are tasked respectively with protecting the rights of minorities and protecting human rights. These governmental bodies investigate allegations of discrimination and bias and can make recommendations to the relevant local or central government authorities. These recommendations generally are followed, although the recommendations do not have the force of law.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act empowers the Government to ban a religious organization if it has provoked inter-community friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act, which restricts funding from abroad. Human Rights activists have criticized the government for selectively applying the FCRA against religious minorities.

In September 2001, the Government officially banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. The Government alleged that the SIMI had links with terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Hizbul Mujahideen.

On May 3, 2001, the Government officially banned Deendar Anjuman, a Muslim group, for “fomenting communal tension” and actions “prejudicial to India’s security.” State prosecutors alleged that some members of the tiny Muslim group called Deendar Channabasaveshwara Siddique (DCS) and its parent organization, Deendar Anjuman, were responsible for the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh church bombings in 2000 (see Section III).

From July to August 2000, approximately 45 members of the organization were taken into custody in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in connection with the bombings. During this time in order to justify the ban, the Government claimed that Deendar Anjuman was involved in a complicated plot to destabilize the country’s communal relations; however, of the group’s few thousand members, probably only a few were involved in terrorist activities.

The fact that a Muslim group was responsible for the bombings of Christian churches was unusual; most attacks against Christians are perpetrated by Hindu extremist groups or by mobs. Some observers have compared the vigorous investigation and prosecution of Deendar members for attacks against Christians with the general lack of vigor in the investigation and prosecution of Hindus accused of carrying out attacks against Christians.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to use temples for harboring persons accused or convicted of crimes. While specifically designed to deal with Sikh places of worship in Punjab, the law applies to all religious sites. The state of Uttar Pradesh passed the “Religious Buildings and Places Bill” during the state assembly budget session from March to May 2000. The bill requires a permit endorsed by the state government before construction of any religious building can begin in the state. The bill’s supporters stated that its aim was to curb the use of Muslim institutions by Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups, but the measure remains a controversial political issue among religious groups in the northern part of the country. Most religious groups from all of the communities oppose the restriction on building religious structures and continue to view it as an infringement upon religious freedom. In West Bengal, legislation implemented in early 2000 requires any person who plans to construct a place of worship to seek permission from the district magistrate; anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one also requires the district magistrate’s permission.

The BJP, which has led two coalition national governments since 1998, is one of a number of offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, an organization that espouses a return to Hindu values and cultural norms. Members of the BJP, the



RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) have been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims. The BJP and RSS express respect and tolerance for other religions; however, the RSS in particular opposes conversions from Hinduism and believes that all citizens should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The BJP officially states that the caste system should be eradicated, but many of its members are ambivalent about this. Most BJP leaders, including Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, also are RSS members. The BJP's traditional cultural agenda has included calls for construction of a new Hindu temple to replace an ancient Hindu temple that was believed to have stood on the site of a mosque in Ayodhya that was destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992; for the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state; and for the enactment of a uniform civil code that would apply to members of all religions.

The BJP does not include the above RSS goals in the program of the coalition Government it leads; however, some minority religious groups have noted that the coming to power of the BJP coincided with an increase in complaints of discrimination against minority religious communities. These groups also claim that BJP officials at state and local levels increasingly have become unresponsive in investigating charges of religious discrimination and in prosecuting those persons responsible.

The degree to which the BJP's nationalist Hindu agenda has affected the country with respect to religious minorities varies depending on the region. State governments continue to attach a high priority to maintaining law and order and monitoring inter-community relations at the district level. As a result, the central Government often is not the most important player in determining the character of relationships of various religious communities between each other and with the state.

In general religious minorities in the northern area of the country are concerned that attacks on religious minorities no longer appear to be confined to Gujarat and Orissa. However, only a few isolated incidents of communal violence were reported in the north during the period covered by this report (see Section III). The appeal of Hindu nationalism seemed to decrease in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP-led state government was defeated in elections in early 2002. The Government dispatched the NCM to investigate attacks against Christians in the northern part of the country in 2000, but the NCM's findings that the attacks were not "communal in nature" led to widespread criticism in the minority community. There is strong evidence that the NCM report misrepresented the victims by claiming that the victims entirely were satisfied that there was no religious motivation behind the violence. Victims of the incidents claim that the local police were not responsive either before or during the attacks. By the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made or were likely to be made in connection with these attacks.

The eastern part of the country presented a varied picture with regard to religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Sporadic attacks continued but were not concentrated in one geographical area. In Orissa, which has been known for violence against religious minorities (particularly after the killings of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young children there in January 1999), the communal situation remained relatively unchanged during the period covered by this report, despite the installation of a BJP-Biju Janata Dal (BJD) government in February 2000. In November 2000, the Orissa government notified churches that religious conversions could not occur without the local police and district magistrate being notified in order to give permission; however, this does not appear to have been enforced. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 contains a provision requiring a monthly report from the state on the number of conversions; district officials are required to keep such records. After a conversion has been reported to the district magistrate, the report is forwarded to the authorities, and a local police officer conducts an inquiry. The police officer can recommend in favor of or against the intended conversion, and often is the sole arbitrator on the individual's right to freedom of religion; if conversion is judged to have occurred without permission from the district magistrate or with coercion, the authorities may take penal action. There were no reports that the district magistrate denied permission for any conversions.

The four southern states are ruled by political parties with strong secular and pro-minority views. Each of these parties—the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, and the Congress Party in Kerala and Karnataka—has a history of support for religious minorities and has attempted to assuage religious minority fears about religious tension in the rest of the country.

The southern branches of the BJP generally take a more moderate position on minority issues; however, religious groups in the region still allege that since the BJP's rise to power in the national Government, some local officials have begun to enforce laws selectively to the detriment of religious minorities. The groups cite numerous examples of discrimination, such as biased interpretations of postal regulations, including removal of postal subsidies; refusals to allocate land for the building of churches; and heightened scrutiny of NGO's to ensure that foreign contributions are made according to the law.

In the west, Gujarat continued to experience incidents of intercommunity strife in which Hindu nationalist groups targeted Christians and Muslims. Beginning in February 2002, after an attack by Muslims on a train in Godhra that resulted in the deaths of 58 Hindus (see Section III), an estimated 2,000 Muslims were killed in rioting in Gujarat that continued throughout the period of this report. The Gujarat state government and the police were criticized for failing to stop the violence, and in some cases participating in or encouraging it. Muslim women and girls were raped, and an estimated 850 to 2,000 Muslims were killed. The violence began on February 27 after a Muslim mob in the town of Godhra attacked and set fire to two train cars carrying Hindu activists. Fifty-eight persons were killed, most of them women and children. On February 28, Hindus attacked and looted Muslim homes, business, and places of worship. In addition, Muslim women and girls were raped and an estimated 2,000 Muslim persons were killed. NGO's report that police were implicated directly in nearly all the attacks against Muslims in Gujarat, and in some cases, NGO's contend, police officials encouraged the mob. Christian and Muslim communities remain suspicious of the state Government.

In Maharashtra, Hindu-Muslim violence has increased in recent years (see Section III). In Madhya Pradesh, intercommunity strife is relatively uncommon. In April 2001, the state's Chief Minister Digvijay Singh strongly stated that his government would deal equally strictly with any violence committed by either Hindu or Muslim fundamentalist groups. There were no incidents of intercommunity strife in the new state of Chhattisgarh during the period covered by this report. Religious communities generally live together harmoniously in Goa, despite one incident of intra-Christian strife during 2000 (see Section III).

Some persons alleged that the state of Gujarat discriminated in distributing aid to victims of the January 26, 2001 earthquake in Kutch district, which left more than 20,000 persons dead. In April 2001, a Human Rights Watch activist toured the affected region and claimed that in the distribution of relief supplies upper caste Hindus received better treatment than lower caste Hindus and poor Muslims in the worst affected towns of Bhuj, Bhachau, and Anjar. However, representatives of many NGO's working in the region reported that the Gujarat government's relief effort did not discriminate by caste or religion.

There is no national law that bars a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating his or her religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is considered dangerous to public order and is prohibited. Given this context, the Government discourages foreign missionaries from entering the country and has a policy of expelling foreigners who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but since the mid-1960's the Government has refused to admit new resident foreign missionaries.

New missionaries currently enter as tourists on short-term visas. In November 2000, the Home Ministry ordered a family of American Christian missionaries based in Tamil Nadu to leave the country because their business and tourist visas were incompatible with their work in the country. In addition to foreign missionaries, several Christian relief organizations have been hampered by bureaucratic obstacles in getting visas renewed for foreign relief work. Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which restricts the ability of certain NGO's, including religiously affiliated groups, to finance their activities with overseas assistance.

The personal status laws of the religious communities sometimes discriminate against women. Under Islamic law, a Muslim husband may divorce his wife spontaneously and unilaterally; there is no such provision for women. Islamic law also allows a man to have up to four wives but prohibits polyandry. Under the Indian Divorce Act of 1869, a Christian woman could demand divorce only in the case of spousal abuse and certain categories of adultery; for a Christian man, a wife's adultery alone was sufficient. However, during the period covered by this report this law was amended by Parliament to allow Christian women to file for divorce for the same reasons as men.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

While the central Government has not been implicated in abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists have criticized the Government for indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities, as well as private citizens.

In June 2000, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) ordered affected states to provide written reports detailing the violence against Christians and the actions taken by state governments. All of the states submitted reports to the NHRC, which found no organized pattern of anti-Christian activity. Some Christian leaders are unhappy with the NCM, which they believe does not represent of their views.

On occasion Hindu-Muslim violence led to killings and a cycle of retaliation (see Section III). In some instances, police and government officials abetted the violence, and at times security forces were responsible for abuses. Police sometimes assisted Hindu fundamentalists in committing violent acts. In February 2002, after a Hindu-Muslim clash in Gujarat, Muslims and human rights activists alleged that the state reserve police sided with the attackers rather than with the victims (see Section III). Human rights activists reported that the Gujarat police received specific instructions not to take action to prevent a possible violent reaction to the February 27 attack by Muslims on a train in Godhra carrying Hindus (see Section III). These observers asserted that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi personally told Ahmedabad police officials on February 27 to allow Hindus 2 days to react "peacefully" to the Godhra incident. The press and human rights activists have reported widely that police refused to come to the aid of Muslim victims, and in some cases even participated in attacks on Muslims and Muslim-owned businesses. The police reportedly told Muslim victims, "we don't have orders to help you." It was reported that assailants frequently chanted "the police are with us," according to eyewitness accounts. On March 24, a report that the government of Gujarat transferred police officials who allegedly had taken action against Hindu rioters drew further media and National Human Rights Commission criticism of perceived government partisanship. In its "final" report on Gujarat, released on June 1, the NHRC held the Gujarat government responsible for the riots and accused it of "a complicity that was tacit if not explicit." It concluded in its report that "there is no doubt, in the opinion of this Commission, that there was a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of rights of life, liberty, equality, and dignity of the people of the state." The report recommended a CBI inquiry into the communal riots, which the state government subsequently refused to allow.

Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state, has been the focus of repeated armed conflict between India and Pakistan, and internally between security forces and Muslim militants who demand that the state be given independence or ceded to Pakistan. Particularly since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces and local officials against the Muslim population, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other forms of physical abuse. Government forces deny these allegations and assert that they target persons not on the basis of religion, but on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. For their part, terrorists killed and otherwise attacked hundreds of Hindu and Muslim civilians in 2001 and 2002. Given that the terrorists exclusively are Muslim and charges of religion-based harassment could be used to further their political objectives, it is impossible to substantiate either the claims of the security forces or those making the allegations against them. It is difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists exclusively are Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian forces stationed there are non-Muslims.

The BJP has been inconsistent in its approach to violence against Christians. In June 2000, in Uttar Pradesh, Vijay Ekka, a witness to the killing of a Catholic priest, George Kuzhikandum, died in police custody. Ekka initially was placed under police protection because of the risk of Hindu reprisals against him. Human rights organizations and minority communities across the country criticized his death. Archbishop Vincent Concessao of Agra said that Ekka's body showed signs of torture, and that police had told church authorities that Ekka had committed suicide. While in detention, Ekka told visitors that he was being tortured constantly in police custody, and said that he was afraid that the police would kill him. The state government initiated an investigation into Ekka's death on June 17, 2000, and a few days later announced plans to establish a judicial inquiry. The Mathura superintendent of police was transferred, and two policemen were arrested in connection with the incident. At the end of the period covered by this report, the trial against

the two police was continuing; another eyewitness in the case had registered a complaint with the NHRC regarding harassment by the local police.

Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom partly is due to an overburdened and corrupt judiciary. The legal system as a whole has many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases move slowly. Official failure to deal adequately with intragroup and intergroup conflict and with local disturbances in some places as a practical matter has abridged the right to religious freedom. A federal political system in which state governments hold jurisdiction over law and order problems contributed to the Government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence. The country's only national law enforcement agency, the CBI, is required to ask state government permission before investigating a crime in the affected state. States often delay or refuse to grant such permission.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

In April 2002, the Pondicherry state government ordered an inquiry into the alleged forced conversions of prisoners to Christianity by the superintendent of Pondicherry Central Prison. Six prisoners filed a complaint, claiming that they had been tortured after refusing to convert.

Hindu nationalist organizations frequently allege that Christian missionaries force Hindus, particularly those of lower castes living in the east, to convert to Christianity. Christians claim that the efforts of Hindu groups to "reconvert" Christians to Hinduism are coercive. There is no firm evidence supporting either side's claim of forced conversions.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### *Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

During the period covered by this report, Parliament passed the long-debated amendments to the Indian Divorce Act of 1869. These amendments allowed Christian women to file for divorce, for the same reasons as men. In May the Mumbai High Court ruled that divorces of Muslim couples must be proven in court. Previously, a Muslim male's assertion of a divorce was sufficient.

The trial for the killing of Graham Staines and his two minor sons is still at a preliminary stage. The trial is being prosecuted by the CBI, rather than by local prosecutors and under the CBI's efforts, the trial appears to be making progress. Singh has been denied bail, and witnesses are beginning to testify to his involvement.

In April 2001, the standing committee of the Home Ministry expressed concern over the "alarming rise of the monster of communalism," and asked the Government to take steps to check the growing divide among communities.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Animosities within and between the country's religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions—at times exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences—have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country's 55-year history. The Government makes some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony when they do occur (see Section II); however, tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and between Hindus and Christians, continue to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the State was founded.

Within the Indian context, the phrase "communal violence" generally is understood to mean Hindu-Muslim conflict and the possibility of retaliation and serious riots. During the period covered by this report, attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states. Some of these attacks were motivated by economic motives or arose in a context of existing nonreligious disputes; others were purely religious in motivation.

Hindu-Muslim violence has led to killings and a cycle of retaliation. In some cases, local police and government officials abetted the violence, and at times security forces were responsible for abuses. Violence against Christians, at least outside of the northeast, rarely results in mass retaliation. However, between Hindu and Muslim communities, even rumors, supposed slights, or perceived insults can result in mass riots.

Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over the existence of mosques constructed several centuries ago on three sites where Hindus believe that temples stood previously. The potential for renewed Hindu-Muslim violence in connection with this controversy remains considerable. Extremist Hindu groups such as the VHP and

Bajrang Dal maintain that they intend to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the site of a 500-year old mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992, with or without the Government's approval. In March 2002, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) agreed to delay the decision on temple construction for at least 3 months.

Some of the most severe communal violence in the country's history occurred during the period covered by this report. On February 27, 2002, Muslim mobs attacked a train in Godhra, Gujarat that was carrying Hindu activists returning from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. The attack reportedly followed an altercation between Hindu activists on the train and Muslim vendors at the train station in Godhra that morning. Two train cars were set on fire, and 58 passengers were killed, including 15 children and 25 women, according to Gujarat state officials. Hindu mobs in Gujarat and Maharashtra allegedly angered by the attack on the train and incited and organized by members of the Sangh Parivar, destroyed Muslim businesses, raped Muslim women, and killed Muslims. The official estimate of the number killed is 950; however, some observers believe that the number may be as high as 2,000. The anti-Muslim violence displaced approximately 150,000 persons who fled for security reasons or because their homes were destroyed. Property damage was significant, with large numbers of Muslim homes, businesses, and religious sites destroyed. Although the most severe violence took place during the week following the attack on February 27, 2002, reports of sporadic violence and interreligious strife continued throughout the end of the period covered by this report. Initially the Government announced a probe only of the Muslim attack on the train; however, after criticism by opposition parties and the media, the government expanded the probe to include the violence after the attack on the train.

In April 2002, a fact-finding team visited Gujarat to document the impact of communal riots on women. The team consisted of women from various women's organizations. The report stated that Muslim women had been subjected to "unimaginable, inhuman, barbaric" sexual violence during the violence. Women suffered rape, gang rape, and molestation.

In October 2001, communal riots broke out in Malegoan, Maharashtra after authorities tried to stop Muslim clerics from distributing pamphlets that advised Muslims against buying American goods to protest U.S. military action in Afghanistan. Twelve persons died in the riots that followed. A curfew was imposed in the town for days, and two plastic factories were burned down.

On August 1, 2000, news of a massacre of Hindu pilgrims to Amarnath by Kashmiri militants spread through the country. In Gujarat, in the cities of Surat, Ahmedabad, Palanpur, and Rajkot and in two villages in the Sabarkantha district, Khed Brahma and Modasa, angry Hindu mobs reacted by burning Muslim businesses. The fights that ensued left two Hindus and three Muslims dead, and caused \$2.5 million (117.5 million rupees) in property damage. In Surat, Muslims alleged that the state reserve police sided with the attackers instead of the victims.

In late September 2000, during voting for city elections in Ahmedabad, a partisan clash with communal overtones developed into a riot. The police fired on the rioting mob, killing eight Muslims.

On October 16, 2000, a gang entered Tahira village, Siwan district, Bihar, and killed five members of a Muslim family. Police suspect that unknown persons in nearby Mohajirpur village committed the killings in retaliation for the killings of Hindu villagers a few days earlier. On December 3, 2000, a group of men in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, attacked and killed a Muslim imam with crude bombs and sickles.

In early September 2000, in the city of Nanded in Maharashtra, Hindu-Muslim violence broke out for 2 days after Muslims in a mosque allegedly threw stones at a Hindu religious procession during the annual Ganesh festival. Approximately 60 persons were injured. The Maharashtra government ordered a judicial inquiry; however, there were no reported results by the end of the period covered by this report. The local media observed a voluntary gag order to prevent the violence from spreading to other cities.

In March three mosques were damaged and adjoining shops and houses set on fire in Bhiwani, Haryana after reports of cow slaughtering in the town. In the period covered by this report, an estimated thirty small Muslim shrines were demolished in various Gujarati cities and villages, and allegedly Hindu rioters placed idols of the Hindu God Hanuman and christened these shrines temples of the "rioting Hanuman." In early 2001, Hindu-Muslim tension increased after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by Afghanistan's Taliban. Almost the entire country's religious community, including most prominent Muslims, strongly protested the Taliban's action; however, some radical Hindus exploited the issue. On March 5, 2001, Bajrang Dal activists allegedly burned a copy of the Koran in New Delhi. A

police investigation resulted in two arrests; however, there was no further action by the end of the period covered by this report.

In the Maharashtra cities of Pune, Aurangabad, Nanded, and Nasik over the weekend of March 9 to 11, 2001, Muslims reacted to an alleged Koran burning in New Delhi by going on strike and burning Hindu property, government vehicles, and a police station in Pune. A radical Muslim student's organization, Student's Islamic Movement of India, had posted inflammatory posters about the incident. Mumbai police averted trouble by holding intercommunity meetings in sensitive areas of the city.

On March 21, 2001, in Amritsar, Punjab, members of a new, fringe Hindu extremist group burned a Koran and threw pig body parts inside a mosque in an attempt to enrage Muslims and start communal violence. A few days of riots, resulting in several deaths and extensive property damage, ensued in the northern cities of Amritsar, Kanpur and Baramulla. A similar Koran burning in Patiala, Punjab, did not lead to major riots. The VHP accused "hostile elements" of trying to stir up communal tension.

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir continued to be a focus of violence. Muslim militants committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and the security forces often used excessive force to suppress them. Civilians frequently are caught in the crossfire. Custodial killings of suspected militants, all of whom are Muslim, are common. Militants also carried out several execution-style mass killings of Hindu villagers and violently targeted Pandits (Hindu Kashmiris) in an attempt to force Hindus to emigrate.

There were a number of violent incidents that are believed to have been carried out by Muslim militants. Early in 2001, eight Sikhs were killed, allegedly by an obscure militant group. On February 3, 2001, two gunmen killed six Sikhs and wounded at least four others in Srinagar. The public interpreted this attack as punishment by militants for the killing earlier in the week of a Muslim civilian, allegedly by Sikh policemen belonging to Kashmir's Special Operations Group; however, such allegations never were proved. The Government sent a four-member team to Kashmir to investigate the killings; however, no one had been charged, and there had been no reported progress in the investigation of the killings at the end of the period covered by this report. Sikhs protested the killings, which led to violent clashes with police. The February 2001 incident was the first attack against the Kashmir Valley's minority Sikh population since the March 2000 killing of 35 Sikh men in the village of Chatthi Singhpora in south Kashmir.

On July 21, 2001, 13 persons, including 6 pilgrims and 2 security force personnel, were killed and 15 others injured in attacks on pilgrims of the annual Amarnath Yatra (pilgrimage). According to unconfirmed reports, militants in disguise opened fire and detonated an explosive device enroute to the Amarnath cave. In May 2001, six Hindu cattle herders in the mountains around Jammu were beheaded, apparently by Muslim militants. On October 1, 2001, Kashmiri terrorists killed 38 employees and security officers and injured 50 others in an attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly. A spokesman for the terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad, based in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

In July 2000, Muslim militants killed three Buddhist monks in Rangdum, Kargil district. On July 30, 2000 militants threw a grenade into a jeep carrying Hindu religious pilgrims near Gulmarg, killing one person and injuring five others. On August 1 to 2, 2000, militants entered a camp of Hindus making the annual pilgrimage to Amarnath in the northern part of the state and fired automatic weapons at tents, at the unarmed civilians in the camp, the pilgrims' local porters and guides, and at army personnel nearby. A total of 32 persons were killed in the attack, all of them unarmed civilians. Similar attacks occurred throughout the night of August 1 to 2, 2000 killing approximately 100 persons in various places in Jammu and Kashmir. On August 17, 2000 militants reportedly killed six Hindu villagers and seriously wounded seven others in Jammu. On August 18, 2000 militants entered a Hindu village in the Koteswara area near Rajauri and indiscriminately fired at villagers, killing four persons and injuring six others. On August 18, 2000 militants killed three elderly men and a teenage boy and wounded two other persons when they fired automatic guns at civilians in Ind village, Udhampur. On August 20, 2000 a person shot and injured a Hindu telephone kiosk operator in Qazi Gund, near Anantnag. Also on August 20, 2000 militants entered the Hindu village of Indeh, Udampur district and killed four members of a Hindu family. No judicial or publicized action was taken against the militants and none seems likely in the future.

In March 2002, the Jammu and Kashmir government demanded an apology from former VHP leader Vinay Katiyar (now Chief of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh) for his comments on the Hazratbal shrine located in the region. Katiyar had stated that the holy relic believed to be a single hair from Prophet Mohammed's head and pre-

served at the Hazratbal shrine actually belonged to a Hindu seer. After Katiyar made this statement, large-scale demonstrations followed.

Violence against Christians increased in 1999 and 2000, although it has decreased since. A Home Ministry report released on April 26, 2001, admitted that there had been “an increase in attacks on Christians and their institutions in the year 2000,” and went on to claim that communal violence as a whole had declined by 9 percent. The outbreak of societal violence against Christians that occurred during 1999 and 2000, which apparently was sparked by rumors of forced conversions of Hindus to Christianity, was not repeated during the period covered by this report. However, tensions persist, and the underlying resentment of Christians by Hindus sometimes leads to violent confrontations. In late April 2001, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India said that while incidents of violence against the Christian community had decreased, “that does not mean that the threat perception has also decreased” among Christians.

Christian missionaries have been operating schools and medical clinics for many years in tribal areas. Tribals (who have no caste status) and Dalits (who are at the lowest end of the caste system) occupy the very lowest position in the social hierarchy. However, they have made socioeconomic gains as a result of the missionary schools and other institutions, which, among other things, have increased literacy among low-caste and non-caste persons. Some higher-caste Hindus resent these gains. They blame missionaries for the resulting disturbance in the traditional Hindu social order as better educated Dalits, tribals, and members of the lower castes no longer accept their disadvantaged status as readily as they once did. Some Hindu groups fear that Christians may try to convert large numbers of lower-caste Hindus, using economic or social welfare incentives. Upper-caste Hindus, the membership base of the BJP and RSS, are afraid that this may destroy the rigid caste hierarchy. Many acts of violence against Christians stem from these fears.

Citizens often refer to schools, hospitals, and other institutions as “missionary” even when they are owned and run entirely by indigenous Christian citizens. By using the adjective “missionary,” the RSS taps into a longstanding fear of foreign religious domination.

Anti-Christian violence has included killings. In December 2001, a 22-year-old nun, Sarita Toppo, was killed in a remote tribal village in Sarguja district of Chattisgarh. In early December 2000, a Catholic priest was killed in Manipur. Earlier in Kurpania, Bihar, a nun was raped and a convent was looted.

Many persons also have been injured in attacks on Christians. In November 2001, four Christian missionaries were seriously injured when they were attacked in Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh. In February 2001, four persons were injured after purported members of the Sangh Parivar attacked the Holy Family Church in Mysore, Karnataka. A group of 70 men, allegedly Bajrang Dal activists attacked the church during the celebration of Mass. The VHP termed the incident as “unfortunate,” and asserted that the attackers did not belong to the Sangh Parivar. In August activists from the VHP and Bajrang Dal attacked three Christian nuns from an orphanage in Jhabua district and some Muslim drivers in Madhya Pradesh. The victims alleged that police later harassed them when they arrived at the police station to lodge a complaint. In March 2001, alleged BJP and RSS activists attacked a Christian congregation at Chevalla in Andhra Pradesh. The alleged reason behind the attacks was the pervasive perception that Christians were encouraging conversions of Hindus.

In August 2000, in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, a mob beat up a priest for distributing Christian literature. In September 2000, a Catholic Church in Karnataka was vandalized. In late November 2000, in Surat district, Gujarat, a Hindu mob vandalized a small church (converted house) in Chindhia village of Vyara Tehsil. The owner of the church land, which is in a tribal area, was a tribal convert to Christianity who reportedly willingly reconverted to Hinduism and supported the vandals in re-consecrating the building for Hindu worship. The Bishop of the Evangelical Church of India, a small Protestant denomination, was refused an audience with the Chief Minister of Gujarat to discuss this case. The Chief Minister and Gujarat authorities considered the case a conflict over conversion and land, and not a religiously motivated attack on Christians. The lower (tehsil level) court ruled in favor of the Christian group, but the district court ruled in favor of the Hindu group’s possession of the premises. The Christian group has appealed the decision to the Gujarat high court (the next higher court).

In January 2001, in a village near Udaipur, Rajasthan, Bajrang Dal activists allegedly beat two Christian missionaries and their followers because they were watching a film on the life of Christ. Both missionaries were attempting to convert local tribals.

On May 7, 2001, Father Jaideep, a Christian priest, was attacked in Jatni town, Orissa. Local citizens reportedly were enraged by the priest's distribution of pamphlets to propagate Christianity in a Hindu-dominated area, allegedly participated in the attack. In June 2001, a report in *The Hindu*, a leading national newspaper, stated that more than 5,000 tribals were reconverted back to Hinduism in Orissa over a period of 2 years.

In March 2002, following the outbreak of communal riots in Gujarat, Christian organizations reported that Christian institutions and functionaries in the state also were attacked. These Christian organizations blame the RSS and the VHP for ransacking and burning Christian missions in Sanjeli and Dhudhia, although these charges have not otherwise been confirmed. In April 2002, a church in Managalore, Karnataka was attacked by approximately 60 persons protesting alleged attempts to convert local Hindus to Christianity. In August 2001 in Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh, 43 Christian tombs in the local burial ground were destroyed. Throughout June and July 2000, there were several bomb explosions in or near Christian institutions in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. No one was killed in the explosions, which caused relatively minor damage. The blasts later were blamed on Deendar Anjuman activists. Members of the group were taken into custody, and the Government later banned the group (see Section II). These incidents, as well as the killing of a principal at a Christian school near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, in 2000 led to heated debates in Parliament during which opposition members accused the Government of failing to rein in the radical elements of the Sangh Parivar (see Section II).

In May 2001, at the Banavali village of Salcete Tehsil in South Goa, a Christian priest named Satirino Antao tried to sell a disputed school property to a splinter Christian group calling themselves the "Believers." The majority of the school's parents were Catholics who opposed the move. Reportedly on May 20, 2001, after a heated meeting, the parents vandalized school property and on May 28, 2001, allegedly assaulted Father Antao. The Archbishop's office claimed that Antao had been removed as priest of Banavali church in 1973 and had no right to sell the school because it belongs to the Catholic Church. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case against Antao remained in the Goa High Court. On May 28, 2001, in Kapadwanj in Kheda district in Gujarat, members of the VHP stopped a funeral procession to prevent the burial of a Christian in a disputed burial ground. The police used tear gas to dispel the VHP members, but the body had to be moved to Ahmedabad for burial.

On March 8, 2001, K.S. Sudarshan made a speech advocating the "Indianization" of Islam and Christianity. He stated that [Muslims and Christians] "should sever their links with the Mecca and the Pope and instead become swadeshi." He also had stated that Christians should "reinterpret their scriptures" in a manner more in keeping with Hindu cultural norms. Catholics took special exception to this; the Archbishop of Delhi pointed out that the Indian Christian church is 2,000 years old (traditionally dating from the Apostle Thomas), and that although the spiritual head was the Pope, the day-to-day administration of the church was entirely in Indian hands. The RSS published an article entitled "Foreign Missionaries, Quit India:RSS" in their journal *The Organiser*, in which they attacked missionary-backed Christian institutions in the country. In March 2001, in Orissa, Christian Archbishop Cheenath gave a speech objecting to an amendment to the Orissa Religious Freedom Act which he believed would make conversion more difficult. He said that fears of forced conversion were not credible. He noted that, although Christian schools have for generations educated a far larger percentage of citizens than there are Christians in the general population, Christians make up slightly less of the population today than they did in the 1991 census.

In September 2001, some Christian leaders, believing that violence against Christians had declined significantly since the summer of 2000, agreed to meet with leaders of Hindu organizations. RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan stated there was a need for more such meetings between the RSS and Christians to create an atmosphere of peace and to remove misgivings and fears within the minority community. However, in 2001 the RSS angered minority communities by publicly challenging the "Indian-ness" of religious minorities. On December 31, 2001, RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan addressed a meeting of volunteers of the Hindu Swayamsewak Sangh (a global organization of expatriate Hindus) in a suburb of Mumbai. He said that only the RSS can serve as the bulwark against what he claimed was the Catholic Church's agenda of converting large Asian populations to Christianity.

In Christian majority areas, Christians sometimes are the oppressors. In Tripura, there were several cases of harassment of non-Christians by Christian members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant tribal group with an evangelical bent. For example, NLFT tribal insurgents have prohibited Hindu and



Muslim festivals in areas that they control, cautioned women not to wear traditional Hindu tribal attire, and prohibited indigenous forms of worship. In Assam, where the population is increasing rapidly, the issue of Bangladeshi migrants (who generally are Muslim) has become very sensitive among the Assamese (predominantly Hindu) population, which considers itself to be increasingly outnumbered.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, approximately 51,000 Pandit families fled their homes in Jammu and Kashmir due to the violence between 1990 and 1993. Of these, 4,674 families are living in refugee camps in Jammu, 235 families are in camps in Delhi, and 18 families are in Chandigarh. The rest still are displaced, but are living outside of the camps in Jammu and Delhi. The Pandit community criticizes bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and fears that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the Muslim majority might threaten its own survival in Jammu and Kashmir as a culturally and historically distinctive group. In August 2000, the Jammu and Kashmir government adopted a proposal designed to facilitate the return of Pandits to the Kashmir valley and rehabilitation of the Pandits. However, various Pandit groups criticized the proposal for failing to address the political aspirations of Pandits, for failing to provide economic support and adequate security for returning Pandits, and for creating special economic zones that would aggravate communal tensions. The proposal was abandoned during 2001, in large part due to the Government's inability to ensure the personal security of returnees.

The country's caste system generates severe tensions due to disparities in social status, economic opportunity, and, occasionally, labor rights. These tensions frequently have led to or exacerbated violent confrontations and human rights abuses. However, intercaste violence generally does not have a significant religious component.

The country's caste system historically has strong ties to Hinduism. Hinduism delineates clear social strata, assigning highly structured religious, cultural, and social roles, privileges, and restrictions to each caste and subcaste. Members of each caste—and frequently each subcaste—are expected to fulfill a specific set of duties (known as dharma) in order to secure elevation to a higher caste through rebirth. Dalits are viewed by many Hindus as separate from or “below” the caste system; nonetheless, they too are expected to follow their dharma if they hope to achieve caste in a future life. Despite efforts by reform-minded modern leaders to eliminate the discriminatory aspects of caste, societal, political, and economic pressures continue to ensure its widespread practice. Caste today therefore is as much a cultural and social phenomenon as a religious one.

The Constitution gives the President the authority to specify, in a schedule attached to the Constitution, historically disadvantaged castes, Dalits, and “tribals” (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system). These “scheduled” castes, Dalits, and tribes, are entitled to affirmative action and hiring quotas in employment, benefits from special development funds, and special training programs. The impact of reservations and quotas on society and on the groups they are designed to benefit is a subject of active debate within the country. Some contend that they have achieved the desired effect and should be modified, while others strongly argue that they should be continued, as the system has not addressed adequately the long term discriminatory impact of caste. According to the 1991 census, scheduled castes, including Dalits, made up 16 percent and scheduled tribes made up 8 percent of the population.

Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs historically have rejected the concept of caste, despite the fact that most of them descended from low caste Hindu families and continue to suffer the same social and economic limitations of low caste Hindus. Low caste Hindus who convert to Christianity lose their eligibility for affirmative action programs. Those who become Buddhists, Jains, or Sikhs do not, as the Constitution groups members of those faiths with Hindus and specifies that the Constitution shall not affect “the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law providing for social welfare and reform” of these groups. In some states, there are government jobs reserved for Muslims of low caste descent.

Members of religious minorities and lower castes criticized the 2001 census as discriminating against them. They claim that they frequently were not allowed to register their correct caste status. Census results are used to apportion government jobs and higher education slots to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In February 2001, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India strongly criticized the census for “discriminating against weaker sections of society” by maintaining that Scheduled Castes may only be Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist. The National Council of Churches in India also protested the census. Despite the fact that Christianity does not recognize caste at all, Christian leaders recognize that society in general still does, and that the 50 percent of the country's Christians who are of Dalit origin may be dis-

advantaged by not being allotted shares of jobs and places in education under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes provisions of the Constitution. Dalit converts to Christianity claim that societal discrimination against them on the basis of caste continues, even within the Christian community. One indicator of the continued slowness of economic and social upward mobility of Dalit Christians is that, of the 180 Catholic bishops in the entire country, only 5 are Dalits. Muslim Dalits, who account for most of the country's 130 million Muslims, also were not counted as Dalits in the census. Muslim leaders have not protested the census issue vigorously.

In 2001 Human Rights Watch reported that the practice of dedicating or marrying young, prepubescent girls to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god," or "Devadasis," reportedly continues in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis, who generally are Dalits, may not marry. They must live apart from their families and are required to provide sexual services to priests and high caste Hindus. Reportedly, many eventually are sold to urban brothels. In 1992 the state of Karnataka passed the Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition) Act and called for the rehabilitation of Devadasis, but this law reportedly is not enforced effectively and criminalizes the actions of Devadasis. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped by higher caste men.

Despite the incidents of violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report, relations between various religious groups generally are amicable among the substantial majority of citizens. There are efforts at ecumenical understanding that bring religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. The annual Sarva Dharma Sammelan (All Religious Convention) and the frequently held Mushairas (Hindu-Urdu poetry sessions) are some events that help improve inter community relations. Prominent secularists of all religions make public efforts to show respect for other religions by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Institutions such as the army consciously forge loyalties that transcend religion. After episodes of violence against Christians, Muslim groups have protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists, and in 2001, prominent Catholics spoke out against the killings of six Sikhs in Kashmir.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates regularly meet with religious leaders and report on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy and Consulate officials met with important leaders of all of the significant minority communities. The NGO and missionary communities in the country are extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet with local NGO's regularly.

The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials publicly expressed regret over the communal violence in Gujarat, extended condolences to the victims, and urged all parties to resolve their difference peacefully. In addition, the USAID office provided funding for an NGO program designed to assist internally displaced persons in Gujarat.

U.S. officials from the Consulate General in Mumbai traveled to Ahmedabad within days of the start of the violence in Gujarat, to meet with officials and private citizens about the violence. As rioting continued, other Mumbai Consulate General officers traveled to the state to assess the situation. Consulate officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the violence in Gujarat.

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### MALDIVES

The 1997 Constitution designates the Sunni branch of Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens must be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion if they do so in private and do not encourage citizens to participate. The President is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." The Government observes Shari'a (Islamic law).

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and freedom of religion is restricted significantly. Citi-

zens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believe that it promotes harmony and national identity.

The U.S. Government does not maintain a resident Embassy in the Maldives; the U.S. Ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka, also is accredited to the Government in Male. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Maldives is an archipelago consisting of approximately 1,200 coral atolls and islands scattered over 500 miles in the Indian Ocean southeast of India, and its population is approximately 280,000.

It is believed that the entire indigenous population is Muslim, the vast majority of which adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. Some foreign Muslims in the country belong to other branches of Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners in the country are allowed to practice their religion privately. Approximately 400,000 tourists (predominantly Europeans and Japanese) visit the country annually. There also are approximately 30,000 foreign workers in the country, primarily from Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh. The workers from these countries represent a mix of the religions prevalent in South Asia, and include Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians.

#### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The 1997 Constitution designates Sunni Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. However, non-Muslim foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion if they do so privately and do not encourage citizens to participate.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

In July 2000, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom stated that the Government should take steps to ensure that Islam remains the only religion in the country. Following the President's statement, the Home Affairs Ministry announced special programs to safeguard and strengthen religious unity. The Government has established a Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs to provide guidance on religious matters. The Supreme Council also prepares a text to be used nationally for Friday sermons at mosques. The Government also has set standards for individuals who conduct Friday services at mosques to ensure adequate theological qualifications and to ensure that services are not dominated by radicals.

The President must be a Sunni Muslim and under the Constitution is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Cabinet ministers also are required to be Sunni Muslims. Members of the People's Majlis (Parliament) must be Muslim. The Government observes Shari'a.

There are no places of worship for adherents of other religions. The Government prohibits non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing and conducting public worship services. Conversion of a Muslim to another faith is a violation of Shari'a and may result in a loss of the convert's citizenship. In the past, would-be converts have been detained and counseled regarding their conversion from Islam. Foreigners have been detained and expelled for proselytizing, although there were no such reports during the period covered by this report.

The law limits a citizen's right to freedom of expression in order to protect "the basic tenets of Islam."

The Government prohibits the importation of icons and religious statues but generally permits the importation of religious tracts, such as Bibles, for personal use.

Islamic instruction is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funds the salaries of instructors of Islam.

Under the country's Islamic practice, certain legal provisions discriminate against women. For example, under Islamic practice, husbands may divorce their wives more easily than vice versa, absent any mutual agreement to divorce. Shari'a also governs intestate inheritance, granting male heirs twice the share of female heirs. A woman's testimony is equal only to one-half of that of a man in matters involving adultery, finance, and inheritance.

##### *Abuses of Religious Freedom*

There were several reports of religious detainees during the period covered by this report. The law limits a citizen's right to freedom of expression in order to protect the "basic tenets of Islam." According to Amnesty International and other sources,

in early 2002, four individuals were arrested for distributing Islamist and anti-government literature. The four men were standing trial on these issues as of June 2002. In addition, a Muslim clergyman reportedly was questioned and temporarily detained during an investigation into accusations that he had made Islamist-tinged sermons in June 2002.

There were no reports of religious prisoners during the period covered by this report.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most citizens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believe that it promotes harmony and national identity.

### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the Maldives; the U.S. Ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka also is accredited to the Government in Male. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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## NEPAL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religions; however, although the Government generally has not interfered with the practice of other religions, there are some restrictions. The Constitution describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Converting or attempting to convert others is prohibited, and members of minority religions occasionally report police harassment. There were reports of isolated attacks on religious buildings, mainly by Maoist insurgents, during the period covered by this report.

Adherents of the country's many religions generally coexist peacefully and respect all places of worship. Those who convert to other religions may face isolated incidents of violence and sometimes are ostracized socially but generally do not fear to admit in public their affiliations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Baha'i, and other religious groups.

### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 54,363 square miles, and its population is approximately 23.15 million. Hindus constitute approximately 81 percent of the population; Buddhists, 11 percent; Muslims, 4.2 percent; and practitioners of Kirant (an indigenous animist religion) and others, 3.6 percent, of which .45 percent are Christian. Christian denominations are few but growing. Estimates put the number of Christians at approximately 400,000, and press reports indicate that 170 Christian churches operate in Kathmandu alone.

### SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religions; however, although the Government generally has not interfered with the practice of other religions, there are some restrictions. The Constitution describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion.

For decades dozens of Christian missionary hospitals, welfare organizations, and schools have operated in the country. These organizations have not proselytized and have operated freely. Missionary schools are among the most respected institutions

of secondary education in the country; many of the country's governing and business elite graduated from Jesuit high schools. Many foreign Christian organizations have direct ties to Nepali churches and sponsor Nepali pastors for religious training abroad.

Some religious holidays, most of them Hindu, are recognized as national holidays. During the period covered by this report, the religious holidays recognized as national holidays were Mahashivaratri, Fagun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dasain and Tihar.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing, activities that are punishable with fines or imprisonment. Some Christian groups are concerned that the ban on proselytizing limits the expression of non-Hindu religious belief.

A conviction for converting others or proselytizing can result in fines or imprisonment or, in the case of foreigners, expulsion from the country. No new cases related to converting others or proselytizing were filed during the period covered by this report. However, four such cases were filed during the period covered by the previous report. One case filed in 1991 remains pending. Members of minority religions occasionally complain of police harassment.

The Government investigates reports of proselytizing. Nongovernmental groups or individuals are free to file charges of proselytizing against individuals or organizations. Such a case was filed with the Supreme Court in December 1999 by a private attorney against the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and the United Missions to Nepal (UMN), an umbrella Protestant group. Hearings in this case have been postponed a number of times. The most recent postponement set the hearing date for August 16, 2002. In April 2001, a case against the UMN was filed with the Supreme Court by a member of the Pashupati Sena Nepal, a Hindu fundamentalist group. The Supreme Court dismissed the case the day after it was filed.

In 1999 Christian groups in Kathmandu were prevented from observing Good Friday in a public park when they failed to obtain the proper permit. However, Easter services in 1999, which were conducted without the proper permit, took place without incident. Public observances of Easter in a Kathmandu park and a Passover Seder in a major hotel in Kathmandu in 2000 and 2001 were uneventful. No disruptions of Christian or Jewish services were reported during the period covered by this report.

Tibetan Buddhists have faced various restrictions on their celebrations. After the June 1, 2001, deaths of members of the royal family, Tibetan community leaders were asked by local officials to refrain from public celebrations of festivals during the period of official mourning. During the second half of 2001, Tibetan community festivals had to be observed on private property, with the exception of a public celebration on September 2, 2001, that was held at Kathmandu's Boudhanath Stupa. However, plans to mark December 10, 2001, as the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize, to be held at the Boudhanath Stupa, were canceled at the request of the authorities. On April 28, 2002, police prevented a Tibetan cultural program planned at a public venue from taking place. The program was to have honored the 13th birthday of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama to be the 11th Panchen Lama.

Local authorities in Kathmandu halted the performance of a traditional dance scheduled to be performed on February 26, 2001, at the Boudanath Stupa during the 6-day celebration of the Tibetan New Year. Other activities that same day and the other 5 days of the festival continued as usual. In December 2000, police stopped a procession of Tibetan school children, monks, and others on their way to Swayambunath Temple in Kathmandu. However, no injuries were reported.

On January 31, 2002, the Cabinet decided that Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs, must register with local District Administration Offices (part of the Home Ministry) and supply information about their funding sources in order to continue operation. Some Muslim leaders criticized the move as discriminatory. After consultation with members of the Muslim community, the Government extended the registration deadline by 6 months to September 2002.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, except for traditional religious practices at Hindu temples, where, for example, members of the lowest caste are not permitted (see Section III). The Press and Publications Act prohibits the publication of materials that create animosity among persons of different castes or religions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

*Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

## SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The adherents of the country's many religions generally coexist peacefully and respect all places of worship. Most Hindus respect the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accord Hindu shrines the same respect. Buddha's birthplace is an important pilgrimage site, and Buddha's birthday is a national holiday.

Some Christian groups report that Hindu extremism has increased in recent years. Of particular concern are the Nepalese affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena. Shiv Sena Nepal and Nepal Shivsena both strongly criticized the Taliban destruction of Buddhist artifacts in Afghanistan in March 2001, as did many political and religious leaders. However, Nepal Shivsena threatened to break or destroy all "Islamic identities" in Nepal in retaliation for Taliban actions. During late 2001, Muslim leaders complained that Hindu fundamentalists increased their campaigns of anti-Islamic pamphleteering and graffiti. Government policy does not support Hindu extremism, although some political figures have made public statements critical of Christian missionary activities. Some citizens are wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and view the growth of Christianity with concern. There were reports of isolated attacks against religious buildings, mainly by Maoist insurgents, during the period covered by this report.

Those who choose to convert to other religions, in particular Hindu citizens who convert to Islam or Christianity, sometimes are ostracized socially. Some reportedly have been forced to leave their villages. While this prejudice is not systematic, it can be vehement and occasionally violent. Hindus who convert to another religion may face isolated incidents of hostility or discrimination from Hindu extremist groups. Nevertheless, converts generally are not afraid to admit in public their new religious affiliations.

Although such discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution, Hindu religious tradition long has prohibited members of the lowest caste from entering certain temples. In a speech on August 16, 2001, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba stressed that caste-based discrimination is illegal. Since then, temple access for members of the lowest castes has improved in many locations. The caste system, although it is prohibited by the Constitution, strongly influences society. Societal discrimination against members of such castes remains widespread and persistent, despite the government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. Draft legislation aimed at improving conditions for members of the lowest castes still is pending at the Ministry of Law and Justice for review.

In July 2000, some members of a predominantly Buddhist community in Gumda, Gorkha district vandalized the homes of six Christian converts. According to press reports, the six families were reintegrated into the community after agreeing not to kill animals or perform other activities contrary to the tenets of Buddhism during religious festivals. Two representatives of different Christian organizations also have alleged harassment of Christians and destruction of at least two churches by Maoist sympathizers.

## SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Baha'i, and other religious groups. The Embassy monitors closely religious freedom and raises the issue with the Government when appropriate.

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**PAKISTAN**

The Constitution (which was suspended following the October 1999 coup) provides for freedom of religion, and states that adequate provisions are to be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Pakistan is an Islamic republic; Islam is the state religion. Islam also is a core element of the country's national ideology; the

country was created to be a homeland for Muslims. Religious freedom is “subject to law, public order, and morality;” accordingly, actions or speech deemed derogatory to Islam or to its Prophet are not protected. In addition, the suspended Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam and imposes some elements of Koranic law on both Muslims and religious minorities.

There were no significant changes in the Government’s treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report. The Government fails in many respects to protect the rights of religious minorities. This is due both to public policy and to the Government’s unwillingness to take action against societal forces hostile to those that practice a different faith. In January 2002, the Government announced plans to abolish the separate electorate system, under which non-Muslim voted in national elections for non-Muslim candidates. Minority leaders and human rights groups had requested the elimination of the separate electorate system for years, on the grounds that it disadvantaged religious minorities. President Pervez Musharraf announced the reinstatement of joint electorates, ending a 15-year practice of preventing religious minorities from voting for local representatives in the provincial and national assemblies. However, on June 26, 2002, the Government proposed constitutional amendments that seek to restore the discretionary powers of the President and the Governors. With this new amendment, the President may dissolve the National Assembly, and the proposal also seeks to eliminate 10 reserved National Assembly special seats for Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, other non-Muslims, and Ahmadis.

Acts of sectarian and religious violence continued during the period covered by this report. A number of massacres in churches and mosques brought into question the Government’s ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence. The worst religious violence was directed against the country’s Shi’a minority, who continued to be disproportionate victims of individual and mass killings.

Specific government policies that discriminate against religious minorities include the use of the “Hudood” Ordinances, which apply different standards of evidence to Muslims and non-Muslims and to men and women for alleged violations of Islamic law; specific legal prohibitions against Ahmadis practicing their religion; and blasphemy laws that most often are used against Muslims and Ahmadis. The number of cases filed under the “blasphemy laws” continued to be significant during the period covered by this report. A Christian nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported that 58 cases were registered during 2000 and 2001, compared to 53 cases during 1999-2000.

Relations between different religious groups frequently are tense, and there were a number of deaths attributed to sectarian violence during the period covered by this report.

Discriminatory religious legislation adds to an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which contributes to acts of violence directed against minority Muslim groups, as well as against Christians, Hindus, and members of Muslim offshoot groups, such as Ahmadis and Zikris. The Government does not encourage sectarian violence; however, there were instances in which the Government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups, particularly Shi’as. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. Parties and groups with religious affiliations target minority groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 310,527 square miles, and its population is approximately 132 million. According to the 1998 census, an estimated 96 percent of the population are Muslim; 1.69 percent are Christian; 2.02 percent are Hindu; and 0.35 percent are “other” (including Ahmadis). The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni. An estimated 10 to 15 percent of the Muslim population are Shi’a. It is estimated that there are between 550,000 and 600,000 Ismailis (a recognized Shi’a Muslim group). Most Ismailis in the country are followers of the Aga Khan; however, an estimated 50,000 Ismailis, known as Borahs, are not.

Religious minority groups believe that they are underrepresented in government census counts. Official and private estimates of their numbers can differ significantly. The most recent census estimates place the number of Christians at 2.09 million and the Ahmadi population at 286,000. The communities themselves each claim membership of approximately 4 million. Estimates for the remaining communities are less contested and place the total number of Hindus at 2.8 million; Parsis (Zoroastrians), Buddhists, and Sikhs at as high as 20,000 each; and Baha’is at

30,000. The “other” category includes tribes whose members practice traditional indigenous religions and who normally do not declare themselves to be adherents of a specific religion, and those who do not wish to practice any religion but remain silent about that fact. Social pressure is such that few persons would admit to being unaffiliated with any religion.

Punjab is the largest province in the country; with 70 million persons, it contains almost half of the country’s total population. Muslims are the majority in Punjab. More than 90 percent of the country’s Christians reside in Punjab, making them the largest religious minority in the province. Approximately 60 percent of Punjab’s Christians live in rural villages. The largest group of Christians belongs to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella Protestant group; the second largest group belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. The rest are from different evangelical and church organizations.

Christians and Hindus each constitute approximately 1 percent of the populations of Sindh and Baluchistan provinces. These two provinces also have a few tribes that practice traditional indigenous religions and a small population of Parsis (approximately 7,000 persons). The Ismailis are concentrated in Karachi and the northern areas. The tiny but influential Parsi community is concentrated in Karachi, although some live in Islamabad and Peshawar. Christians constitute approximately 2 percent of Karachi’s population. The Roman Catholic diocese of Karachi estimates that 120,000 Catholics live in Karachi, 40,000 in the rest of Sindh, and 5,000 in Quetta, Baluchistan. Evangelical Christians have converted a few tribal Hindus of the lower castes from interior Sindh. An estimated 100,000 Hindus live in Karachi. According to local Christian sources, between 70,000 and 100,000 Christians and a few thousand Hindus live in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP).

Ahmadis are concentrated in Punjab and Sindh. The spiritual center of the Ahmadi community is the large, predominantly Ahmadi town of Rabwah in Punjab.

No data are available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. However, because religion is tied closely to a person’s ethnic, social, and economic identity, religion often plays an important part in daily life. Most Muslim men offer prayers at least once a week at Friday prayers, and the vast majority of Muslim men and women pray at home or at the workplace during one or more of the five daily times of prayer. During the month of Ramadan, many otherwise less observant Muslims fast and attend mosque services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worship regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu speakers do so.

The Shikaris (a hunting caste now mostly employed as trash collectors in urban Sindh) are converts to Islam, but eat foods forbidden by Islam.

Many varieties of Hinduism are practiced, depending upon location and caste. Hindus have retained or absorbed many traditional practices of Sindh. Hindu shrines are scattered throughout the country. Approximately 1,500 Hindu temples and shrines exist in Sindh and approximately 500 in Baluchistan. Most shrines and temples are tiny, no more than wayside shrines. During Hindu festivals, such as Divali and Holi, attendance is much greater.

The Sikh community regularly holds ceremonial gatherings at sacred places in the Punjab. Prominent places of Sikh pilgrimage include Nanakana Sahib (where the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born), Hasan Abdal (a shrine where an imprint of his hand is kept), and Andkarta Poora or Daira Baba Nanak Sahib in Sialkot District (where Guru Nanak is buried).

Parsis, who practice the Zoroastrian religion, have no regularly scheduled congregational services, except for a 10-day festival in August during which they celebrate the New Year and pray for the dead. All Parsis are expected to attend these services; most reportedly do. During the rest of the year, individuals offer prayers at Parsi temples. Parsis maintain a conscious creedal and ceremonial separation from other religions, preserving rites and forbidding marriage to members of other religions.

Only one group described by the authorities as a “foreign cult” reportedly has been established in the country. In Karachi members of the U.S.-based “Children of God” are rumored to be operating a commune where they practice polygamy. However, during the period covered by this report, there was no evidence that this group existed.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country. The largest Christian mission group operating in Sindh and Baluchistan engages in Bible translation for the Church of Pakistan (a united church of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans), mostly in tribal areas. An Anglican missionary group fields several missionaries to assist the Church of Pakistan in administrative and educational work. Roman Catholic missionaries, mostly Franciscan, work with persons with disabilities.



## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The suspended Constitution provided for freedom of religion, and stated that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, the Government imposed limits on freedom of religion. The suspended Constitution also provided that there was no taxation for propagation of a religion that is not one's own; no obligation to receive instruction in a religion that is not one's own; and no denial of admission to public schools on the basis of religion. According to the suspended Constitution, the country was an Islamic republic, and Islam was the state religion. Islam also was a core element of the country's national ideology; the country was created to be a homeland for Muslims. Under the suspended Constitution, both the President and the Prime Minister were to be Muslims, and all senior officials were required to swear an oath to preserve the country's "Islamic ideology." Freedom of speech was provided for; however, this right is subject to "reasonable restrictions" that can be imposed "in the interest of the glory of Islam." Actions or speech deemed derogatory to Islam or to its Prophets are not protected. Under the suspended Constitution, the Ahmadi community is defined as non-Muslim because Ahmadis do not believe that Mohammed was the last prophet of Islam; however, most Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims. In 2000 the Government incorporated the Islamic provisions of the suspended Constitution into the Provisional Constitutional Order, including the clause declaring Ahmadis to be non-Muslims.

The suspended Constitution protected religious minorities from being taxed to support the majority religion; no one could be forced to pay taxes for the support of any religion other than his own. For example, Sunni Muslims are subject to the "zakat," a religious tax of 2.5 percent of their income; however, Shi'a Muslims and other religious minorities do not pay the "zakat."

Separate categories exist for different religions in the administration of specific religious sites. Hindus and Sikhs, because of population shifts that occurred between India and Pakistan after partition, come under the auspices of the Evacuee Property Board, which is located in Lahore and is empowered to settle disputes regarding Hindu and Sikh property. However, Hindus and Sikhs also may settle such disputes in civil courts. Christian churches are free to take their disputes over religious property and management to the courts. Some minorities have expressed displeasure over government management of religious property.

In Sindh, Muslim mosques and shrines come under the purview of the Auqaf Administration Department, a branch of the provincial government devoted to the upkeep of shrines and mosques, facilities for pilgrims, and the resolution of disputes over possession of a religious site. In both Sindh and Baluchistan, the Government has provided funds for the upkeep and repair of the Hindu Gurumander temple in Karachi and funded the repair of Hindu temples damaged by Muslim rioters protesting the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu mobs in Ayodhya, India, in 1992.

Permission to buy land comes from one municipal bureaucracy, and permission to build a house of worship from another. For all religious groups, the process appears to be subject to bureaucratic delays and requests for bribes.

The suspended Constitution safeguarded "educational institutions with respect to religion." For example, under the suspended Constitution, no student could be forced to receive religious instruction or to participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination also was prohibited under the suspended Constitution.

"Islamiyyat" (Islamic studies) is compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other faiths legally are not required to study Islam, they are not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In practice teachers compel many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies.

The suspended Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely on the basis of religion. Government officials state that the only factors affecting admission to governmental educational institutions are students' grades and home provinces. However, students must declare their religion on application forms. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe in the unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed; non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community. Many Ahmadis and Christians reported discrimination in applying to government educational institutions due to their religious affiliation.

Several Muslim religious holidays are considered national holidays, including Eid ul-Fitr, Eid ul-Azha, Muharram (Shi'a), and the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday. Most businesses have limited hours during the month of Ramadan.

On June 19, 2002, the Government announced the Madrassah Registration Ordinance of 2002, which went into effect immediately. Under the ordinance, all madrassahs (religious schools) were required to register with the Pakistan madrassah Education Board and provincial boards. Madrassahs failing to do so may be fined or closed. The madrassahs no longer are allowed to accept grants or foreign aid from foreign sources, although madrassahs offering courses in science, math, Urdu, and English are eligible for government funds. Foreign madrassah students are to be required to obtain no objection certificates. Madrassahs were given 6 months to comply. The ordinance was designed to regulate the madrassahs, where many poor children are educated, and combat religious extremism.

In December 1999, the Supreme Court ruled that all forms of interest (riba) are un-Islamic and directed the Government to implement an interest-free banking and financial system by June. In June 2001, the Shari'a Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court extended for 1 year the deadline for implementation of this judgment. However, on June 24, 2002, the Supreme Court vacated the earlier decision and remanded the case to the Federal Shariat Court for reconsideration.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Government does not ban formally the public practice of the Ahmadi religion, but the practice of the Ahmadi faith is restricted severely by law. A 1974 constitutional amendment declared Ahmadis to be a non-Muslim minority because, according to the Government, they do not accept Mohammed as the last Prophet of Islam. However, Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims and observe Islamic practices. In 1984, the Government added Section 298(c) into the Penal Code, prohibiting Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslim or posing as Muslims; from referring to their faith as Islam; from preaching or propagating their faith; from inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith; and from insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. This section of the Penal Code has caused problems for Ahmadis, particularly the provision that forbids them from "directly or indirectly" posing as Muslims. This vague wording has enabled mainstream Muslim religious leaders to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Mohammed. The constitutionality of Section 286(c) was upheld in a split-decision Supreme Court case in 1996. The punishment for violation of this section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. This provision has been used extensively by the Government and anti-Ahmadi religious groups to target and harass Ahmadis. Ahmadis also are prohibited from holding any conferences or gatherings.

The suspended Constitution provides for the "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle the Government does not restrict organized religions from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. However, in practice Ahmadis suffer from restrictions on this right. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly have been closed; others reportedly have been desecrated. Ahmadis also are prohibited from being buried in Muslim cemeteries.

Missionaries are allowed to operate in the country. Proselytizing (except by Ahmadis) is permitted as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge they are not Muslim. However, all missionaries are required to have specific missionary visas, which have a validity of 2 to 5 years and allow only one entry into the country per year. These visas carry the annotation "missionary." Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries are available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems are frequent.

There have been press reports that the authorities are conducting surveillance on the Ahmadis and their institutions.

The blasphemy laws refer to Sections 295, 296, 297, and 298 of the Penal Code and address offenses relating to religion. Section 295(a), a colonial-era provision, originally stipulated a maximum 2-year sentence for insulting the religion of any class of citizens. In 1991 this sentence was increased to 10 years. In 1982 Section 295(b) was added, which stipulated a sentence of life imprisonment for "whoever willfully defiles, damages, or desecrates a copy of the holy Koran." In 1986 during the martial law period, another amendment, Section 295(c), established the death penalty or life imprisonment for directly or indirectly defiling "the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed." In 1991 a court ruled invalid the option of life imprisonment for this offense. Section 296 outlaws voluntary disturbances of religious assemblies, and Section 297 outlaws trespassing on burial grounds. Section 298(a), another colonial-era provision, forbids the use of derogatory remarks about holy personages. Personal rivals and the authorities have used these blasphemy laws, especially Section 295(c), to threaten, punish, or intimidate Ahmadis, Christians, and even orthodox Muslims. No person has been executed by the State under any of these provisions; however, some persons have been sentenced to death, and religious extremists have killed persons accused under the provisions. The blasphemy laws

also have been used to “settle scores” unrelated to religious activity, such as intrafamily or property disputes.

President Musharraf has not modified the blasphemy laws since his attempt to reform them in April 2000. The attempted reform would have required complainants to register new blasphemy cases with the local deputy commissioners instead of with police officials, to reduce the number of persons who are accused wrongly under the laws. Religious and sectarian groups mounted large-scale protests against the proposed change and some religious leaders stated that if the laws were changed, even just procedurally, persons would be justified in killing blasphemers themselves. In May 2000, in response to increasing pressure and threats, Musharraf abandoned the proposed reforms to the blasphemy laws.

When blasphemy and other religious cases are brought to court, extremists often pack the courtroom and make public threats against an acquittal. As a result, judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continue trials indefinitely. As a result, those accused of blasphemy often face lengthy periods in jail and are burdened with increased legal costs and repeated court appearances.

Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any act, including speech, intended to stir up religious hatred is punishable by up to 7 years of rigorous imprisonment. In the anti-terrorist courts, cases were to be decided within 7 working days, and trials in absentia were permitted. Appeals to an appellate authority were required to occur within 7 days, but appellate authority since has been restored to the high courts and the Supreme Court. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the accused is guilty.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing; however, the Government restricts the right to freedom of speech with regard to religion. Speaking in opposition to Islam and publishing an attack on Islam or its prophets are prohibited. The penal code mandates the death sentence for anyone defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed, life imprisonment for desecrating the Koran, and up to 10 years’ imprisonment for insulting another’s religious beliefs with intent to outrage religious feelings. Although prosecutions for publishing appear to be few, the threat of the blasphemy law is ever present. There were 80 blasphemy cases pending throughout the country during the period covered by this report.

Government authorities closed down a leading provincial newspaper, the Frontier Post, and placed five of its employees under protective custody in late January 2001, following the publication of a letter to the editor that contained comments that were critical of Islam. Two employees of the Frontier Post remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. Government law enforcement officials failed to prevent a mob from setting fire to the Frontier Post printing presses on January 30, 2001. Security officials did not arrest any of the participants in the mob violence.

On June 4, 2001, government authorities in Abbotabad, NWFP, sealed the office and printing press of Mahaasaib, a local daily newspaper, and arrested the resident editor, shift manager, and subeditor. The authorities accused the newspaper of committing blasphemy because it published an article that argued that Islam does not require men to grow beards. The Governor of the NWFP reportedly asked the local administration to reverse its decision; however, the local administration denied the request, stating that it did not wish to provoke social unrest. The staff members remained in custody, and the office still was closed, at the end of the period covered by this report. There were no new developments in this case.

Ahmadis charge that they suffer from restrictions on their press. Christian scriptures and books are available in Karachi and in traveling bookmobiles. However, in recent years, the owner of a Christian bookshop in Karachi has reported frequent questioning by local Muslim religious leaders and occasional questioning by the police. Such questioning may lead to self-censorship among Christians. Hindu and Parsi scriptures are freely available. Foreign books and magazines may be imported freely, but are subject to censorship for objectionable religious content.

There have been press reports that the authorities are conducting surveillance on the Ahmadis and their institutions.

The Government restricts the distribution and display of certain religious images such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ.

The Government designates religion on citizens’ passports. To obtain a passport, citizens must declare whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim; Muslims also must affirm that they accept the unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed, declare that Ahmadis are non-Muslims, and specifically denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement. Under increasing pressure from fundamentalist leaders, in May 2002, the Government reinstated a column on the voter registration form that requires Muslims to make an oath accepting the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed. When joint electorates were restored in January 2002, this oath was re-

moved from voter registration forms, but religious leaders protested heavily because it no longer identified Ahmadis on the voter lists. The Election Commission in June 2001 announced that it would accept objections to Ahmadis who registered to vote as Muslims from members of the public. Voters with objections filed against them are required either to sign an oath swearing to the finality of the prophethood of Mohammed or be registered as non-Muslims on the voter list.

Links with coreligionists in other countries are maintained relatively easily. The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan report no difficulties. Ismailis are in regular contact with their headquarters, and their officials, including Prince Karim Aga Khan, visit the country regularly. Under reciprocal visa arrangements, Indian Hindu and Sikh leaders and groups travel regularly to the country. However, the Government prohibits Ahmadis from participating in the Hajj (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia) and Baha'is from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel.

The authorities sometimes prevent leaders of politico-religious parties from traveling to certain areas if they believe that the presence of such leaders would increase sectarian tensions or cause public violence. During the period covered by this report, religious party leaders from the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jammāt-Ulema-Islamia remained under house arrest for several months during the winter and spring of 2001 and 2002, following threats that they would lead protests and riots against the Government's crackdown on jihadi organizations.

In January 2002, the Government eliminated the separate electorate system. Separate electorates had been a longstanding point of contention between religious minorities and human rights groups on the one side and the Government on the other. With the elimination of the separate electorate system, political representation is to be based on geographic constituencies that represent all residents regardless of religious affiliation. Minority group leaders believe this change may help to make public officials take notice of the concerns and rights of minority groups. Because of their concentrated populations, religious minorities could have significant influence as swing voting blocks in some constituencies. Few non-Muslims are active in the country's mainstream political parties due to limitations on their ability to run for elective office under the previous separate electorate system.

However, the return of joint electorates eliminated parliamentary and assembly seats reserved for minorities. Some minority leaders complained that these seats should have been retained after the joint electorate system was eliminated. While minorities welcome the opportunity to be able to elect local representatives to the national and provincial assemblies, it is unlikely that any of the future elected officials will come from minority groups; having reserved seats for the minorities would do more to increase their presence in law-making bodies.

Civil marriages do not exist; marriages are performed and registered according to one's religion. Upon conversion to Islam, the marriages of Jewish or Christian men remain legal; however, upon conversion to Islam, the marriages of Jewish or Christian women, or of other non-Muslims that were performed under the rites of the previous religion, are considered dissolved. Children born to Jewish or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate only if their husbands do not also convert, and if women in such cases do not separate from their husbands. Children of non-Muslims men who convert are not considered illegitimate.

Members of minority religions volunteer for military service in small numbers, and there are no official obstacles to their advancement. However, in practice non-Muslims do not rise above the rank of major general and are not assigned to politically sensitive positions. Ahmadis report severe discrimination in the civil service; they complain that a "glass ceiling" prevents them from being promoted to top positions and that certain government departments have refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis.

The Government nationalized all church schools and colleges in Punjab and Sindh in 1972. The government of Sindh gradually denationalized church schools (without providing compensation) from 1985 to 1995. The government of Punjab devised a plan to denationalize schools and return them to their original owners in 1996. In Punjab several schools belonging to the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (PCUSA), were denationalized and returned to the former owners in 1998. However, the notification was withdrawn in 1999. In November 2001, the government of Punjab notified PCUSA of the denationalization of six schools. The Church gained possession of three of the schools, but a group of teachers filed a case in civil court challenging the denationalization, obtained stay orders against the PCUSA, and took possession of the other three. The case still was pending, although the government of Punjab considers the matter settled.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, entrusted with safeguarding religious freedom, has on its masthead a Koranic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God." The Ministry claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, to repair minority places of worship, to set up minority-run small development schemes, and to celebrate minority festivals. However, religious minorities question its expenditures, observing that localities and villages housing minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Bishops' Conference of the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), using official budget figures for expenditures in 1998, calculated that the Government actually spent \$17 (PRs 850) on each Muslim and only \$3.20 (PRs 16) on each religious minority citizen per month.

Religious minorities are afforded fewer legal protections than Muslim citizens. Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority faiths. For example, all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, are subject to certain provisions of Shari'a. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions, which reflect differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The federal Shari'a court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinances, and judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslims. The federal Shari'a court also may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In the Malakand division and the Kohistan district of the NWFP, ordinances require that "all cases, suits, inquiries, matters, and proceedings in the courts shall be decided in accordance with Shari'a." These ordinances define Shari'a as the injunctions found in both the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Mohammed. Islamic law judges, with the assistance of the Ulema (Islamic scholars), under the general supervision of the Peshawar High Court, try all court cases in the Malakand Division and the Kohistan District. Elsewhere in the country, partial provisions of Shari'a apply.

The martial law-era Hudood Ordinances criminalize non marital rape, extramarital sex, and various gambling, alcohol, and property offenses. The Hudood Ordinances reportedly are based on the Government's interpretation of Islamic principles and are applied to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some Hudood Ordinance cases are subject to Hadd, or Koranic, punishment; others are subject to Tazir, or secular, punishment. Although both types of cases are tried in ordinary criminal courts, special rules of evidence apply in Hadd cases, which discriminate against

non-Muslims. For example, a non-Muslim may testify only if the victim also is non-Muslim. Likewise, the testimony of women, Muslim or non-Muslim, is not admissible in cases involving Hadd punishments. Therefore, if a Muslim man rapes a Muslim woman in the presence of women or non-Muslim men, he cannot be convicted under the Hudood Ordinances.

For both Muslims and non-Muslims, all consensual extramarital sexual relations are considered a violation of the Hudood Ordinances; if a woman cannot prove the absence of consent in a rape case, there is a risk that she may be charged with a violation of the Hudood Ordinances for fornication or adultery. The maximum punishment for this offense is public flogging or stoning; however, there are no recorded instances of either type of punishment since the 1980s. According to a police official, in a majority of rape cases, the victims are pressured to drop rape charges because of the threat of Hudood adultery charges being brought against them. In March 2002, Zafran Bibi was sentenced to death for a violation of the Hudood Ordinances, in a case that drew national and international attention to the Hadood ordinances. Bibi filed rape charges against her brother-in-law, but when a medical exam indicated that she already was pregnant at the time of the alleged rape, her father-in-law then accused her of adultery with another person as a way to settle an old rivalry and protect his son. A lower Shari'a court convicted her of adultery and sentenced her to death by stoning. When Bibi's husband claimed to be the father of the child she carried, refuting the charge of adultery, the Federal Shariat bench overturned the verdict and acquitted Bibi. A Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry for Women has criticized the Hudood Ordinances and recommended their repeal. The Commission also stated that the laws on adultery and rape have been subject to widespread misuse, and that 95 percent of the women accused of adultery are found innocent in the court of first instance or on appeal. However, the Commission pointed out that, by that time, the woman may have spent months in jail, suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the police, and seen her reputation destroyed. The Commission found that the main victims of the Hudood Ordinances are poor women who are unable to defend themselves against slanderous charges. According to the Commission, the laws also have been used by husbands and other male family members to punish their wives and female family members for reasons that have nothing to do with perceived sexual impropriety. Approximately one-third or more of the

women in the jails in Lahore, Peshawar, and Mardan in 1998 were awaiting trial for adultery under the Hudood Ordinances. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan stated that this ratio remained unchanged during 2001. However, no Hadd punishment has been imposed since the Hudood Ordinances went into effect.

Human rights monitors and women's groups believe that a narrow interpretation of Shari'a has had a harmful effect on the rights of women and minorities, as it reinforces popular attitudes and perceptions and contributes to an atmosphere in which discriminatory treatment of women and non-Muslims is accepted more readily. Some Islamic scholars also stated privately that the Hudood Ordinances are a misapplication of Shari'a.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

Police torture and other forms of mistreatment of persons in custody are common. However, there were no confirmed reports of torture of prisoners or detainees because of their religious beliefs during the period covered by this report.

There have been instances in which police have used excessive force against individuals because of their religious beliefs and practices; however, it sometimes is difficult to determine whether or not religious affiliation is a factor in police brutality. The police also have failed to act against persons who use force against other individuals because of their religious beliefs (see Section II). The Government admits that police brutality against all citizens is a problem. However, both the Christian and Ahmadi communities have documented instances of the use of excessive force by the police and police inaction to prevent violent and often lethal attacks on members of their communities. For example, both the Christian and Ahmadi communities claim that in the past persons were killed because of their religious beliefs; however, there were no such allegations during the period covered by this report.

The law regulates arrest and detention procedures; however, the authorities do not always comply with the law, and police arbitrarily arrest and detain citizens. Violence in Punjab has prompted the Government on several occasions to round up hundreds of members of religious extremist groups and students at madrassahs believed to be terrorist recruiting centers and training grounds. The police also arrest demonstrators, including members of religious minorities. For example, on January 16, 2001, security personnel arrested 16 Muslim, Christian, and Hindu protesters from the All Faiths' Spiritual Movement International during a demonstration protesting the country's blasphemy laws. Several participants in the demonstration threw stones and ignored police orders to disperse peacefully. No formal charges were filed, and all of those arrested were released after several days.

There were scattered reports that authorities interrogated persons due to their religious beliefs or practices.

Prison conditions, except for the "class A" facilities provided to wealthy and politically high profile prisoners, are extremely poor and constitute a threat to the life and health of prisoners. According to the NCJP and the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS), non-Muslim prisoners do not enjoy the same facilities as Muslim inmates.

Blasphemy laws often target members of the Ahmadi community or other Muslims. According to Ahmadi sources, 70 Ahmadis were charged formally in criminal cases on a "religious basis" (including blasphemy) in 2001, compared to 166 cases in 2000 and 80 cases in 1999. In March 2002, a foreign Ahmadi of Pakistani origin was arrested, tried, and acquitted of publishing blasphemous pamphlets. In April 29, 2001, four Ahmadis, including Abdul Majeed, president of the local Ahmadi community, were charged with blasphemy for constructing minarets and the Mihrab of an Ahmadi mosque. During the period covered by this report, there was no further information regarding Ghaffar Ahmad and Nasir Ahmad. On May 12, 2001, the court rejected the bail application for Pervaiz Masih, and his case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 1999, several hundred persons looted and burned property in Haveli Lakha, Okara district, Punjab, which belonged to Mohammad Nawaz, a local Ahmadi leader accused of planning to build an Ahmadi house of worship. A neighbor reportedly incited the incident by accusing Nawaz of building the house of worship after the two were involved in a property dispute. Nawaz, a doctor, reportedly intended to build a free clinic next to his home. The mob looted and burned Nawaz's home. According to Ahmadi sources, police personnel arrived at the scene but did nothing to stop the crowd. As of the end of the period covered by this report, neither the neighbor nor anyone in the crowd had been arrested or questioned in connection with the incident, and police had not taken steps to find or return any of Nawaz's property. However, Nawaz and his two sons were arrested and charged with blasphemy. They were released on bail several days later; however, the blasphemy case against them was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Three

other Ahmadis in Haveli Lakha also were charged with blasphemy in connection with the incident despite being out of town at the time.

The blasphemy laws also are used to harass Christians; A number of cases have lingered for years. On April 1, 2001, police registered a blasphemy case against Pervez Masih, a Christian who ran a private school in Sialkot district, Punjab. According to CLAAS, the Sunni Muslim owner of another private school charged Masih with blasphemy because he was jealous of Masih's success in attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim students. However, according to the press reports, Pervez Masih was charged because he answered a student's questions about Mohammed's life. Masih remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. In May 2000, a lower court in Sialkot district, Punjab, sentenced two Christian brothers to 35 years' imprisonment each and fined both of them \$1,500 (PRs 75,000). The brothers were convicted of desecrating the Koran and blaspheming against the Prophet Mohammed. The Lahore High court was scheduled to hear their appeal in June 2002; however, the appeal was not heard during the period covered by this report. On May 2, 2000, Augustine Ashiq Masih was charged with blaspheming against the Prophet in Faisalabad; he remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. Ayub Masih (detained since 1996) was convicted of blasphemy for making favorable comments about Salman Rushdie, the author of the controversial book "The Satanic Verses," and was sentenced to death in April 1998; his appeal was scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court in October 2002.

Police also arrested Muslims under the blasphemy laws; government officials maintain that approximately three-quarters of the total number of blasphemy cases that have been brought to trial involved Muslims. Often the cases are drawn out, with a very lengthy appeal process. In September 1998, a Shi'a Muslim, Ghulam Akbar, was convicted of blasphemy in Rahimyar Khan, Punjab, for allegedly making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed in 1995, and he was sentenced to death. Akbar's death sentence was the first such sentence for a Muslim for a violation of the blasphemy law. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. In October 2001, a Sunni Muslim, Dr. Younis Shaikh, was sentenced to death for blasphemy in Rawalpindi, Punjab, reportedly for stating in front of his students at Capital Homeopathic College in Rawalpindi that the Prophet Mohammed's first marriage was not conducted according to Islamic law and custom. His appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

No estimate of the number of religious detainees exists; however, the Government has arrested and detained numerous Muslims and non-Muslims for their religious beliefs and practices under the blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws. The blasphemy laws were meant to protect both majority and minority faiths from discrimination or abuse; however, in practice these laws frequently are used by rivals and the authorities to threaten, punish, or intimidate religious minorities. Credible sources estimate that several hundred persons have been arrested since the laws were implemented; however, significantly fewer persons have been tried. Most of the several hundred persons arrested since 1989 have been released due to a lack of sufficient evidence. However, many judges reportedly handed down guilty verdicts to protect themselves and their families from retaliation by religious extremists. Many judges also repeatedly postpone action in certain blasphemy cases in response to religious extremists; the result of this practice is that accused blasphemers remain in prison for extended periods of time. According to the NCJP, religious minorities constitute a proportionally greater percentage of the prison population. Government officials state that although religious minorities account for approximately 5 percent of the country's population, 25 percent of the cases filed under the blasphemy laws are aimed at religious minorities. Yusuf Ali, who had been convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in August 2000, was shot and killed in the Lahore Central Jail by another inmate on June 11, 2002. The prisoner who killed Ali was a member of the banned Muslim extremist group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. Some jail officials were arrested in connection with the incident, including an Assistant Superintendent (who reportedly took responsibility for the shooting and stepped down). At the end of the period covered by this report, the shooting still was under investigation by the authorities.

The Government has taken steps to curb religious extremism and militancy, with mixed results. In August 2001, the Government banned two groups known for sectarian violence, the Lashkar-e-Jangvi and Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan, and ordered their offices closed. During the following week, the Government arrested several hundred activists belonging to two larger sectarian organizations, the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan. On August 20, the Sindh provincial government announced a ban on fundraising activities by certain militant religious groups. On August 22, the police raided more than 50 offices, mosques, and madrassahs in Karachi in connection with the ban. More than 250 persons were de-

tained temporarily in the raids. On January 12, 2002, the Government banned another four groups suspected of inciting religious violence and jihad: Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, and Tehrik-e-Jafria. Hundreds of local and national offices were closed, and almost 2,000 members of these groups were arrested in the weeks following the January announcement. Most detainees were low-level organization members who were released after 90 days without being charged. Rumors persist that higher level party leaders enjoyed the protection and patronage of government agencies, and avoided arrest by going underground. In late June 2002, the authorities in Lahore arrested at least 30 members of 2 of the banned groups. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had accelerated its crackdown against members of several extremist groups.

The Punjab government ordered a crackdown on extremists in early October 1999; as a result several hundred persons were arrested, including the leader of the SSP, Maulana Mohammad Azam Tariq, and SSP branch president Maulana Mohammad Ahmad Ludhianvi. Tariq was released after a year of imprisonment; however, he was arrested again in February 2001 and remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

Following the killings of four Sunni clerics on January 28, 2001, Sunni Muslim students participated in violent demonstrations and arson attacks in Karachi (see Section III). The Government dispatched police, paramilitary, and military forces to disperse the demonstrations, and several students and police officers were injured. Following a wave of sectarian killings between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims (see Section III), the Government arrested between 150 and 250 alleged Sunni and Shi'a militants in Karachi. Government officials stated that the arrests and a public call for religious leaders to enforce a code of conduct resulted in a reduction of such killings during the traditionally violent period of Muharram.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Religious minorities state that members of their communities, especially minors, sometimes are pressured by private groups and individuals to convert to Islam.

#### *Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

The Government took some specific steps to improve the situation of religious minorities during the period covered by this report. In January 2002, the Government eliminated the separate electorate system. The Government also continued to promote human rights awareness in its training of police officers.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Many religious and community leaders, both Muslim and non-Muslim, reported that a small minority of extremists account for the vast majority of violent acts against religious minorities. However, discriminatory religious legislation has encouraged an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which has led to acts of violence directed against Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and Zikris. Members of religious minorities are subject to violence and harassment, and police at times refuse to prevent such abuses or charge persons who commit them (see Section II). Most victims of religious violence in the country are Shi'a Muslims. Wealthy religious minorities and those who belong to religious groups that do not seek converts report fewer instances of discrimination.

Sectarian violence and tensions continued to be a serious problem throughout the country. More than 300 persons died in incidents of sectarian violence in Punjab in the last 4 years, according to one credible newspaper report. Despite the Government's ban on groups involved in sectarian killings, violence between rival Sunni and Shi'a Muslim groups continued during the period covered by this report. Many of the victims were Shi'a professionals—doctors and lawyers—who were not politically active or involved with sectarian groups. During the period covered by this report, at least 53 cases of sectarian violence occurred in the country, most carried out by unidentified gunmen.

On August 14, 2001, unidentified motorcycle riders shot and killed Rizwan Shah, an activist, in the Harkatuk Ansar. On August 27, 2001, two men killed District Superintendent of Police Syed Kausar Abbas Gilani as he jogged in Bahawalpur stadium. On August 28, 2001, unidentified assailants shot and killed Abid Abbas Naqzi, a subdivisional officer in Baluchistan's building and roads department. On September 1, 2001, Syed Hamid Ali Rizvi, the father of a television executive, was ambushed and killed in Karachi. On September 4, 2001, gunmen motorcyclists shot and killed Ali Hussain Naqvi, a prayer leader at a Karachi Shi'a mosque. On Sep-



tember 10, 2001, senior bureaucrat Altaf Hussain Bangash was shot and killed in Karachi, 2 years after his father-in-law and brother-in-law were killed in the same manner. On September 11, 2001, Allama Razi Haider and his 11-year-old son were killed in their car in Karachi. On September 13, 2001, three were killed and four persons were injured when unidentified gunmen opened fire on a religious gathering in Azizabad. The same day, Professor Atiq Hasan Naqvi of Balochistan University in Quetta was injured and his son was killed in an ambush. On September 25, 2001, unidentified gunman killed Karachi industrialist Abdul Razzaq. There were no new developments in the cases of Sheikhul Hadih Maulana, Saleem Qadri, and Kausar Abbas Shah Gillani.

On October 3, 2001, gunmen killed Dr. Jameeluddin and injured nurse Nighat Seema in Karachi. The next day, three assailants killed six worshippers and injured eight others at the Ali-Murtaza Shi'a mosque in Karachi. On October 6, 2001, four persons were killed and nine others were injured when gunmen on a motorcycle fired at persons leaving a madrassah. On October 9, 2001, Jamiat Ahle Hadith leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor was shot and killed while returning from prayers. The same day, Syed Gul Iman Shah, principal of a technical college, was killed in front of the school in Karachi. On October 10, 2001, two motorcycle riders killed Hasan Zaidi, grandson of noted scholar Syed Salman Nadvi and chairman of the Sindh board of technical education. On October 15, 2001, two more motorcycle riders killed two police constables guarding a Shi'a mosque. On October 17, 2001, police constable Syed Didar Hussain Shah was shot and killed outside the residence of a district judge. On October 19, 2001, Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP) leader Allama Nazir Ahmed Abbas was shot and killed in his shop in Vehari. One hour earlier, a mob killed the uncle of a former National Assembly member.

On November 10, 2001, gunmen ambushed and killed Advocate Ashiq Ali Abdullah in Karachi. The next day, four assailants killed a TJP leader's cousin in Lahore. The day after, another TJP activist was shot and killed in Karachi. On November 15, 2001, Syed Hasan Abidi, general finance manager at Abbas Dying, was attacked and killed in his car in Karachi. On November 22, 2001, Dr. Ghulam Ali Sheikh, chief medical officer at the Hyderabad central prison, died 10 days after being shot in the head. On November 28, 2001, gunmen shot and killed a leading Karachi fruit exporter. On December 21, 2001, Ehteshamuddin Haider, elder brother of Interior Minister Haider, was shot and killed in Karachi. On December 31, 2001, Nazir Hussain, a local Shi'a activist, was killed in Dera Ismail Khan. On January 9, 2002, Syed Hassan Ali Rizvi was shot and killed by two motorcyclists in Karachi. On January 28, 2002, one person was killed and two others were injured when motorcycle gunmen opened fire on a policeman. On January 29, 2002, Syed Jawwad Ali, a retired insurance company officer, was killed in Karachi. On February 4, 2002, Jhang Police Inspector Mohammad Jamil was killed after conducting several successful operations against the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The same day, Dr. Fayyaz Karim was shot and killed outside a mosque in Karachi. On February 12, 2002, Dr. Rashid Mehdi was shot and killed in a Karachi hospital parking lot. On February 26, 2002, 11 persons were killed and 16 others were injured when 3 militants opened fire on a Shi'a mosque in Khayaban-e-Sirsyed. On March 4, 2002, noted urologist Dr. Aale Safdar was killed in Karachi. In May 2002, masked gunmen killed well-known moderate Sunni scholar Ghulam Mustafa Malik, his driver, and a police officer who pursued the assailants. On April 26, 2002, in Bukker, Punjab province, 12 women were killed and many others were injured when a bomb exploded in the women's section of a Shi'a mosque. On June 17, 2002, unknown gunmen shot and killed three Shi'a men outside of a Shi'a mosque, who was opposed by the Sunni extremist groups Lash-Kar-e Jhangvi and Singh Sahaba Pakistan.

Sectarian violence between members of different religious groups received national attention in the period covered by this report and continued to be a serious problem. Ahmadis, Christians, and other religious minorities often were the targets of such violence.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of which is instigated by organized religious extremists. Ahmadi leaders charge that militant Sunni mullahs and their followers sometimes stage marches through the streets of Rabwah, a predominantly Ahmadi town and spiritual center in central Punjab. Backed by crowds of between 100 and 200 persons, the mullahs reportedly denounce Ahmadis and their founder, a situation that sometimes leads to violence. The Ahmadis claim that police generally are present during these marches but do not intervene to prevent trouble. In August 2001, a mob destroyed an Ahmadi mosque in Shekhpura; authorities did not stop the violence and later arrested 28 Ahmadis in connection with civil disorder. In July 2001, Sheikh Nazir Ahmed, an Ahmadi leader in Faisalabad, was killed. On September 14, 2001, Noor Ahmed and his son Tahir were killed and two others were injured in an armed at-

tack on their house in Narowal. In October 2001, Ahmadi Ejaz Ahmed Basra and his son Shahjehan were shot and killed in Ghatilalian. Basra had provided evidence in a trial against several men accused of killing five Ahmadis the previous year, and the shooting was thought to be in retaliation for his testimony. In January 2002, Ghulam Mustafa Mohsin, an Ahmadi who had received previous death threats, was killed in his home in District Toba Tek Singh. Ahmadi activists maintain a list of more than 20 other cases involving harassment during the period of this report.

Christians also have been victims of violence. In October 2001, masked gunmen opened fire at the St. Dominic church in Bahawalpur, killing 11 persons and injuring more than a dozen worshippers. Authorities still were investigating the case at the end of the period covered by this report. Officially, three members of an extremist group thought to be responsible for the Bahawalpur incident were killed in a "police encounter." Authorities also detained three others in relation to the church killings. In March 2002, an attack on a church in Islamabad left five persons dead, including two foreign nationals. During the period covered by this report, police made no arrests in connection with past sectarian killings. Numerous such killings remain unresolved.

Ahmadis suffer from societal harassment and discrimination. Even the rumor that someone may be an Ahmadi or have Ahmadi relatives can stifle opportunities for employment or promotion. Most Ahmadis are home-schooled or go to private Ahmadi-run schools. Those Ahmadi students in public schools often are subject to abuse by their non-Ahmadi classmates. The quality of teachers assigned to predominately Ahmadi schools by the Government reportedly is poor. In late May, in response to a question from Islamic clerics, President Musharraf denounced Ahmadis as "non-Muslims."

While many Christians belong to the poorest socioeconomic groups, this may be due more to ethnic and social factors than to religion. These factors also may account for a substantial measure of the discrimination that poor Christians face. In Karachi the majority of Roman Catholics are Goan Christians, or descendants of Eurasian marriages. They often are light-skinned and are relatively well educated and prosperous, in sharp contrast to their coreligionists (mostly members of evangelical denominations), who often are dark-skinned and poorly educated. Many poor Christians remain in the profession of their low caste Hindu ancestors (most of whom were "untouchables"). Their position in society, though somewhat better today than in the past, does not reflect any major progress despite more than 100 years of consistent missionary aid and development. Christian students reportedly are forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Ismailis report that they are the object of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to the comparative economic advances they have made. Ismailis have not been harassed by the Government nor have they been targeted by extremist groups; however, they report that they frequently are pressured to adopt certain practices of conservative Muslims or risk being ostracized socially.

Although there are few if any citizens who are Jewish, anti-Semitic sentiments appear to be widespread, and anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist press articles are common.

Shikharis generally are ostracized by other Muslims, primarily because of their eating habits.

Some Sunni Muslim groups publish literature calling for violence against Ahmadis and Shi'a Muslims. Some newspapers frequently publish articles that contain derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis and Hindus.

Persons who have been accused under the blasphemy laws (see Section II), including those acquitted of the charges against them, often face societal discrimination.

Proselytizing generally is considered socially inappropriate among Muslims; missionaries face some difficulties due to this perception. For example, some Sunni Muslim groups oppose missionary activities and have at times issued verbal threats against missionaries in order to discourage them from working.

While there is no law instituting the death penalty for apostates (those who convert from Islam) as required by the Koran, social pressure against such an action is so powerful that most such conversions reportedly take place in secret. In one high-profile case in 2001, a movie actress from Karachi converted to Christianity from Islam without penalty. However, according to missionaries, police and other local officials harass villagers and members of the poorer classes who convert. Reprisals and threats of reprisals against suspected converts are common.

Discrimination in employment based on religion is believed to be widespread. Christians in particular have difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists say that the employment situation has improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years. Christians and Hindus also find themselves disproportionately represented in the country's most oppressed so-

cial group, bonded laborers. Illegal bonded labor is widespread. Agriculture, brick-kiln, and domestic workers often are kept virtually as slaves. According to the NCJP, the majority of bonded labor in those sectors is non-Muslim. All are subject to the same conditions, whether they are Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. In 1999 the Government removed colonial-era entries for sect from government job application forms to prevent discrimination in hiring. However, the faith of some, particularly of Christians, often can be ascertained from their names.

There are a number of NGO's and civic groups that promote interfaith dialog.

There have been no reported updates to the 1998 bombing of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Karachi or the 1999 killing of 9 persons in Nowshera during the period covered by this report.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. representatives maintained regular contacts with major Muslim and minority religious groups. Embassy officers also maintained a dialog with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and to discuss problems. Embassy officers closely monitored the status of religious freedom and acted when appropriate. The Embassy also has assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up on specific cases involving religious minorities.

### SRI LANKA

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but it is not recognized as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religion freely, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

During the period covered by this report, the status of respect for religious freedom improved due to the ongoing peace process between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As a result of the February 2002 ceasefire accord, government security forces vacated Hindu religious properties in the north and east, although there were some complaints by Tamils as of mid-May that some Hindu properties still were occupied. After June 20, the LTTE allowed increased access to the religious sites in areas under its control.

Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there has been occasional resistance by Buddhists to Christian church activity, and in particular to the activities of evangelical Christian denominations. While the courts generally have upheld the right of evangelical Christian groups to worship and to construct facilities to house their congregations, the Government limits the number of foreign religious workers granted temporary residence permits. During the December 2001 parliamentary elections, 12 supporters of a Muslim-based political party were killed in 2 separate incidents. However, the killings appear to have been politically, rather than religiously, motivated.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

#### SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 25,322 square miles and a population of approximately 18.5 million. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity all are practiced in the country. Approximately 70 percent of the population are Buddhist, 15 percent are Hindu, 8 percent are Muslim, and 7 percent are Christian. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west, with much of the north almost exclusively Hindu. Muslims, although present in many other areas, make up a particularly high percentage of the population in the east. The other parts of the country have a mixture of religions, with Buddhism overwhelmingly present in the south.

Most members of the majority Sinhalese community are Theravada Buddhists. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis, with a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Roman Catholics account for almost 90 percent of the Christians, with Anglicans and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. The Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Assemblies of God are present as well. Evangelical Christian groups have increased their membership in recent years, although the overall number of members in these groups still is small.

## SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution gives Buddhism a “foremost position,” but it also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religions freely, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is a Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs. Within the Ministry, there is a Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs and a Department of Muslim Cultural and Religious Affairs which deal primarily with cultural issues and maintenance of historical sites. The Ministry of Muslim affairs also deals with all other issues involving the Muslim community. A Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs monitors government relations with Christian denominations, which have resisted greater government involvement in their affairs. Instead, they are registered individually through acts of Parliament or as corporations under domestic law. Christian denominations must fill out and submit forms in order to be recognized as corporations. This gives them legal standing to be treated as corporate entities in their financial and real estate transactions.

There is no tax exemption for religious organizations as such. However, churches and temples are allowed to register as charitable organizations and therefore are entitled to some tax relief.

Religion is a mandatory subject in the school curriculum. Parents and children may choose whether a child studies Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Students of minority religions other than Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity must pursue religious instruction outside of the public school system. There are no separate syllabuses provided for religions with a smaller following in Sri Lanka. Religion is taught in schools from an academic point of view.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, major religious festivals of all faiths are celebrated as national holidays.

The Government has established councils for interfaith understanding.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for the last 30 years, the Government has sought to limit the number of foreign religious workers given temporary work permits. Permission usually is restricted to denominations that are registered with the Government. Most religious workers in the country, including most Christian clergy, are Sri Lankan in origin.

During the December 2001 Parliamentary elections a Buddhist monk was elected to Parliament as a member of the Opposition People’s Alliance party. This was the first time a member of the clergy ever had been elected to Parliament. There was some public debate as to the appropriateness of a member of the clergy participating in the political process, but the monk was allowed to take his position and he now is an active Member of Parliament.

Some evangelical Christians, who constitute less than 1 percent of the population, have expressed concern that their efforts at proselytizing often are met with hostility and harassment by the local Buddhist clergy and others opposed to their work. They sometimes complain that the Government tacitly condones such harassment, but there is no evidence to support this claim. Some Christian organizations claim that they continue to face opposition at the local level in rural areas but state that legal action or the threat of legal action generally has resulted in their being allowed to continue their activities.

Issues related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance are adjudicated by the customary law of each ethnic or religious group. In 1995, the Government raised the minimum age of marriage for women from 12 to 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continue to follow their customary religious practices. The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group may result in discrimination against women.

*Abuses of Religious Freedom*

For the past 19 years, the Government, which is largely made up of Sinhalese (who predominantly are Buddhist), has fought the LTTE, a terrorist insurgent organization fighting for a separate state for the country’s Tamil (and predominantly Hindu) minority. After unilateral ceasefires were declared in December 2001, the Government and the LTTE signed a ceasefire accord in February 2002, which currently is in force.

Religion does not play a significant role in the conflict, which essentially is rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians all have been affected by the conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives. In the past, the military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major

operations, instructing civilians to congregate at safe zones around churches and temples. In the conflict areas in the north, the Government occasionally has been accused of bombing and shelling Hindu temples and Christian churches. In November 1999, the LTTE recaptured the area where the Madhu shrine, a well-known Christian pilgrimage site, is located, and granted some limited access for a period thereafter. During the period covered by this report the LTTE generally allowed Catholics access to the Shrine.

On May 5, 2000, a Buddhist holy day, a bomb was placed outside of a Buddhist temple in Batticaloa, on the eastern coast, killing several persons. The Government has investigated the incident and blamed the LTTE for the deaths; however, during the period covered by this report, no arrests were reported. The LTTE has attacked Buddhist sites, most notably the historic Dalada Maligawa or "Temple of the Tooth," the holiest Buddhist shrine in the country, in the town of Kandy in January 1998. Thirteen worshipers, including several children, were killed by the bombing. The Government still is attempting to locate and arrest the LTTE perpetrators of the attack. As a result, the Government has augmented security at a number of religious sites island-wide, including the Temple of the Tooth. In contrast to previous years, the LTTE did not target Buddhist sites during the period covered by this report; however, the LTTE has not indicated that it will abstain from attacking such targets in the future.

The LTTE has discriminated against Muslims, and in 1990 expelled some 46,000 Muslim inhabitants—virtually the entire Muslim population—from their homes in areas under LTTE control in the northern part of the island. Most of these persons remain displaced and live in or near welfare centers. Although some Muslims returned to Jaffna in 1997, they did not remain there due to the continuing threat posed by the LTTE. In the past, there were credible reports that the LTTE had warned thousands of Muslims displaced from the Mannar area not to return to their homes until the conflict was over. However, in the period covered by this report, the LTTE has made positive statements on the possible return of Muslims to this area. In the past, the LTTE also expropriated Muslim homes, land, and businesses, and threatened Muslim families with death if they attempted to return. However, it appears that these attacks were not targeted against persons due to their religious beliefs, but rather that they were a part of an overall strategy to clear the north and east of persons not sympathetic to the cause of an independent Tamil state. In April 2002, LTTE leaders met with Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, and promised to permit the return of Muslims to their homes when a negotiated settlement to the conflict was attained. The LTTE also promised to cease kidnaping and harassing Muslims in the east. As of mid-May 2002, LTTE-Muslim relations appeared to have improved due to this meeting.

The LTTE has been accused in the past of using church and temple compounds, in which civilians are instructed by the Government to congregate in the event of hostilities, as shields for the storage of munitions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### *Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom*

As part of the February 2002 ceasefire accord, government security forces have begun the process of vacating Hindu religious properties in the north and east that they have occupied. There were some complaints by Tamils as of mid-May 2002, however, that the properties were not being vacated as quickly as promised. Since June the LTTE also has allowed visits to religious sites in areas it controls.

### SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Discrimination based on religious differences is much less common than discrimination based on ethnic group affiliation. In general, the members of the various faiths tend to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. On occasion, evangelical Christians, or anyone perceived to be attempting to convert Buddhists to Christianity, have been harassed by Buddhist monks. Some Christian organizations complain that the Government tacitly condones such harassment, although there is no evidence to support this claim (see Section I).

There are credible reports that in some rural areas members of Christian organizations have been physically assaulted for alleged attempts to convert Buddhists. In one instance, in April, a Buddhist monk was reported to have assaulted two members of the Salvation Army, claiming that they were attempting to convert a

person they were meeting with. The Salvation Army members were shaken by the incident but not seriously injured. In some rural areas, small Christian organizations have stated that they do not report cases of harassment in order to avoid additional attention. In other areas, religious leaders have found that a peaceful coexistence can be maintained as long as the leaders of all of the religious communities maintain a dialog.

On December 5, 2001, a total of 12 Muslim supporters of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress were killed in 2 separate incidents. The killings occurred on Parliamentary election day and appear to have been politically—and not religiously—motivated. The alleged perpetrators, including a former Minister, currently are awaiting trial.

There are reports that members of various religious groups give preference in hiring in the private sector to members of their own group or denomination. This practice likely is linked to the country's ongoing ethnic problems and does not appear to be based principally on religion. There is no indication of preference in employment in the public sector on the basis of religion.

In April 2001, three Sinhalese men attacked a Muslim cashier. The Muslim community in Mawanella protested police inaction during and after the attack. In response, approximately 2,000 Sinhalese, including Buddhist monks, rioted in the Muslim section of town and confronted the Muslim protesters. Two Muslims were killed, and a number of buildings and vehicles were destroyed. The Muslim community throughout the western portion of the country staged a number of protests claiming the police did nothing to prevent the riot. Some of the protests resulted in direct clashes between the Muslim and Sinhalese communities. The police investigation of these incidents remains open, but no one has been arrested in connection with the violence.

In mid-February 1999, a group of religious leaders from the Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities made a visit to the north central part of the country, an LTTE-controlled area. The purpose of the visit was to assess the humanitarian situation and to talk with senior LTTE leaders. The group later met with the President, but there were few concrete results. However, since the ceasefire went into effect in December 2001, there has been increasing contact and dialog among religious leaders. For example, Buddhist leaders have been able to travel through LTTE-controlled areas to get to Buddhist shrines in the Jaffna area.

#### SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Representatives of the Embassy regularly meet with representatives of all of the country's religious groups to review a wide range of human rights, ethnic, and religious freedom issues. The U.S. Ambassador has met with many religious figures, both in Colombo and in his travels around the country. Christian bishops and prominent Buddhist monks, as well as prominent members of the Hindu and Muslim communities, are in regular contact with the Embassy. The Embassy has been supportive of efforts by inter-faith religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict.