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Foremost among the rights Americans hold sacred is the freedom to worship as we choose...we also remember that religious liberty is not just an American right; it is a universal human right to be protected here at home and across the globe. This freedom is an essential part of human dignity, and without it our world cannot know lasting peace. President Barack Obama

Fifteen years ago, the U.S. Congress took a momentous step in support of religious freedom when it passed the International Religious Freedom Act, establishing within the Executive Branch the position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. With this measure, the U.S. government made a bold statement on behalf of those who were oppressed, those who were persecuted, and those who were unable to live their lives at the most basic level, for the simple exercise of their faith. Whether it be a single deity, or multiple deities, or no deities at all, freedom to believe--including the freedom not to believe--is a universal human right.

Freedom of religion and belief and the right to worship as one chooses fulfill a deep and abiding human need. The search for this freedom led the Pilgrims to flee Europe for America's shores centuries ago, and is enshrined in our own Constitution. But it is by no means exclusively an American right. All states are committed to freedom of thought, conscience and belief in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been the touchstone and the global standard for the protection of human rights around the world since 1948.

The right to religious freedom is inherent in every human being. Unfortunately, this right was challenged in myriad ways in 2012. One of the basic elements of the International Religious Freedom Act is the requirement that the Department of State publish an annual report on the status of religious freedom in countries around the world, and the record of governments in protecting--or not protecting--this universal right.

This year's report tells stories of courage and conviction, but also recounts violence, restriction, and abuse. While many nations uphold, respect, and protect

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religious freedom, regrettably, in many other nations, governments do not protect this basic right; subject members of religious minorities to violence; actively restrict citizens' religious freedom through oppressive laws and regulations; stand by while members of societal groups attack their fellow citizens out of religious hatred, and fail to hold those responsible for such violence accountable for their actions. The immediate challenge is to protect members of religious minorities. The ongoing challenge is to address the root causes that lead to limits on religious freedom. These causes include impunity for violations of religious freedom and an absence of the rule of law, or uneven enforcement of existing laws; introduction of laws restricting religious freedom; societal intolerance, including anti-Semitism and lack of respect for religious diversity; and perceptions that national security and stability are best maintained by placing restrictions on and abusing religious freedom.

This comprehensive report comprises almost two hundred individual reports on countries and territories. Each report sets forth the laws, policies, and practices of governments; describes the nature of societal respect for religious freedom; and highlights the specific efforts that the U.S. government made in each country to promote respect for religious freedom. Some reports document religious bigotry, hatred, and oppression. Others describe examples of religious freedom, societal respect, and interfaith dialogue. Whatever the case, the Secretary of State has been clear that these reports should be accurate, objective, detailed, and frank.

For 2012, some common themes regarding the status of religious freedom around the world emerged. In general, these themes reveal negative trends, and often cut across national and regional boundaries. The individual reports provide the details, but these worrying trends--and the authoritarian governments that restrict their citizens' ability to practice their religion--merit highlighting.

Government Restrictions and Abuses

Laws and policies that impede the freedom of individuals to choose a faith, practice a faith, change their religion, tell others about their religious beliefs and practices, or reject religion altogether remain pervasive. Numerous governments

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imposed such undue and inappropriate restrictions on religious groups and abused their members, in some cases as part of formal government law and practice.

In **China**, religious affairs officials and security organs scrutinized and restricted the religious activities of registered and unregistered religious and spiritual groups. The government harassed, detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison a number of religious adherents for activities reportedly related to their religious beliefs and practice. These activities included assembling for religious worship, expressing religious beliefs in public and in private, and publishing religious texts. The government continued to strictly regulate the religious activities of Uighur Muslims. Authorities sentenced one Uighur Muslim to ten years in jail for selling “illegal religious material;” harassed or detained Catholic clergy not affiliated with the government “Catholic Patriotic Association,” including auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daquin; and indicted seven house church Christians accused of being members of a banned group, “the Shouters,” a charge they denied. In response to a prolonged period of progressively more repressive government actions and religious policies in Tibetan areas, including intense official crackdowns at monasteries and nunneries resulting in the loss of life, arbitrary detentions, and torture, Tibetan monks, nuns, and laypersons increasingly sought to express despair and dissent by self-immolating, often at or near a monastery, usually resulting in death. There were reportedly 83 self-immolations in 2012. In **North Korea**, the government severely restricted religious freedom, including discouraging organized religious activities, except those controlled by officially recognized groups. The government dealt harshly with all opponents, including those who engaged in religious practices it deemed unacceptable. Religious and human rights groups outside the country provided numerous reports in previous years that members of underground churches were arrested, beaten, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs. An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 political prisoners were believed to be held in prison camps in remote areas, some for religious reasons. In **Vietnam**, although authorities made some progress in expanding registration of religious groups, government practices and bureaucratic impediments restricted religious freedom. Unregistered and unrecognized religious groups were potentially vulnerable to harassment, as well as coercive and punitive actions by national and local authorities. Authorities in An Giang and Dong Thap provinces continued to harass and abuse followers of the unsanctioned

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Traditional Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. The government continued to imprison individuals for their religious beliefs, including Hoa Hao activist Bui Van Tham. In **Burma**, the government maintained restrictions on certain religious activities, limited freedom of religion, and actively promoted Theravada Buddhism over other religions, particularly among certain ethnic minority populations. Some government officials encouraged or enticed non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism in southern Chin State. Authorities subjected religious organizations to restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, and continued to monitor the meetings and activities of religious organizations. Muslims in Rakhine State, particularly those of the Rohingya minority group, continued to be subjected to lethal violence and to experience severe forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. Villages of Kaman people, an officially recognized Muslim national race group distinct from the Rohingya, also were burned to the ground.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and the government enforced restrictions on religious freedom. The government reportedly deported foreigners for worshipping privately. Shias continued to face discrimination, and authorities restricted public Shia celebrations, even in some areas with large Shia populations. At least one individual was beheaded for engaging in “sorcery.” In **Syria**, the government increased its targeting and surveillance of members of faith groups it deemed a “threat,” including members of the country’s Sunni majority. Such targeting included killing, detention, and harassment. There were credible reports that the regime targeted citizens based on religious affiliation in mixed neighborhoods in Homs and rural Aleppo. Violent extremist activity intensified as the civil conflict escalated, including the targeting of religious minorities by groups such as the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Jabhat al-Nusra. In **Iran**, the arrest and harassment of members of religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, increased significantly. There continued to be reports that the government imprisoned, harassed, intimidated, and discriminated against people because of their religious beliefs. Authorities placed U.S.-Iranian citizen and Christian pastor Saeed Abedini under house arrest in July to investigate previous charges of undermining national security by leading a network of house churches. In September Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officials raided his residence and took him to Evin prison, where he remained in

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detention at year's end. Seven Bahai leaders remained in detention at the end of 2012, serving sentences extended by the authorities in 2011 to 20 years. The government charged them in 2011 with "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic."

In **Russia**, government restrictions targeted members of minority religious groups through the use of extremism charges to ban religious materials and restrict groups' right to assemble. Authorities also restricted religious minorities through detention, raids, denial of official registration with the Ministry of Justice, denial of official building registration, and denial of visas to religious workers. In **Uzbekistan**, the government continued to imprison individuals on charges of "extremism," raided religious and social gatherings of unregistered and registered religious communities, confiscated and destroyed religious literature, and discouraged minors from practicing their faith. There were numerous reports of beatings and abuse of prisoners serving sentences for religious convictions. In **Turkmenistan**, government authorities at times disrupted meetings of unregistered religious groups, and subjected individuals suspected of unauthorized or unregistered activity to search, detention, confiscation of religious materials, seizure of private property, verbal abuse, fines, pressure to confess to holding an illegal meeting, and beating. In **Tajikistan**, the government generally enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom, interpreting its right to restrict religious activity very broadly, and requiring that any religious activity be approved by the government to be legal. The law prohibits people under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities, and effectively bars most women from attending Muslim religious services. In **Afghanistan**, members of minority religious groups continued to suffer discrimination, and the government often did not protect members of minorities from societal harassment. The government enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom selectively and in a discriminatory manner. In **Azerbaijan**, the government placed restrictions on members of religious groups it considered "nontraditional," including Jehovah's Witnesses and unsanctioned Muslim religious organizations. Religious registration requirements left unregistered groups--particularly those considered "nontraditional" by the government--vulnerable to police harassment, fines, and closures mandated by court decisions.

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In **Cuba**, the Communist Party, through its Office of Religious Affairs, continued to monitor and control most aspects of religious life. Although many religious groups reported reduced interference from the government in conducting services, importing religious materials, receiving donations from overseas, and in traveling abroad, serious restrictions to the freedom of religion remained. The government regularly prevented peaceful human rights activists, including members of the Ladies in White, from attending religious services, and routinely used government-sponsored protest groups to assault or detain them. Before Pope Benedict XVI's visit, authorities arrested many members of the peaceful political opposition or prevented them from leaving their homes to participate with the Pope in celebrating mass. A number of religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, continued their years-long wait for a decision from the Ministry of Justice on pending applications for official recognition.

In **Sudan**, there were credible reports that state governments and local authorities razed two churches. In June, authorities in Khartoum State overrode a longstanding informal agreement and destroyed a building used as an Episcopal church, and two days later, a Catholic church. In **Eritrea**, the government continued to harass members of unregistered religious groups, and detained many without due process, occasionally for long periods of time, sometimes by informally charging them with threatening national security. At year's end, NGOs estimated the total of those imprisoned because of their religious beliefs at 1,500, including several dozen members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions were clearly on the rise--particularly in Europe and Asia. Government restrictions, which often coincided with societal animosity, resulted in anti-Muslim actions that affected everyday life for numerous believers. The impact ranged from education, to employment, to personal safety within communities. Government restrictions on religious attire also remained an issue, as Muslim women faced increasing restrictions on head coverings in schools, in public sector employment, and in public spaces. In **Belgium**, the Constitutional Court ruled that the nation's 2011 ban on face-covering attire, with no exception for religious garments, did not violate religious freedom. In **India**, several

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educational institutions in Mangalore, Karnataka, reportedly banned Muslim girls from wearing headscarves. Since 2009, schools and colleges run by both Hindu and Christian administrations have prevented Muslim female students and teachers from covering their heads, citing a uniform dress code. In contrast, in November, **Turkey** lifted a ban on female students wearing headscarves in schools that provided religious education.

In both Sunni and Shia majority countries, officials and society repressed groups whose members viewed themselves as part of branches or offshoots of Islam. Authorities in a number of countries, including **Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Indonesia**, harassed, abused, detained, or banned Ahmadi Muslims from practicing their faith. In some countries in which the Sunni branch of Islam made up the majority of the population, or otherwise held political power, authorities targeted Shias and other members of minorities for discrimination, undue restriction, and/or abuse, and members of society often followed their lead. For example, in **Saudi Arabia**, Muslims who did not adhere to the government's interpretation of Sunni Islam faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship and community centers. In **Bahrain**, members of the Shia community continued to face official discrimination, detention, excessive use of force, and alleged torture. The government revoked the citizenship of 31 Shias, including three clerics, on charges of "damage to state security." In **Pakistan**, the law prohibits Ahmadi Muslims from identifying themselves as Muslims or risk imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims on their national identity card, which is needed to vote, must swear their belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, and denounce the Ahmadiyya Muslim movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. This provision prevents Ahmadi Muslims from obtaining legal documents and puts pressure on members of the community to deny their beliefs to enjoy citizenship rights, including the right to vote. In the **Maldives**, the government restricted religious freedom and pressured citizens to conform to a stricter interpretation of Islamic practice, particularly following the change of government in February. The law prohibits citizens' practice of any religion other

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than Islam and requires the government to exert control over all religious matters, including the practice of Islam.

In **Iran**, a country with a Shia majority, authorities targeted Sunnis and members of other minorities in similar fashion. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all members of non-Shia religious groups, most notably for Bahais, as well as for Sunni Muslims including Sufis, evangelical Christians, Jews, and Shia groups that did not share the government's religious views. Christian pastors Behnam Irani and Farshid Fathi remained in jail at year's end. Officials reportedly pressured them to renounce their Christian faith throughout their ordeals and threatened and harassed their friends and families. Zoroastrians also reported detentions and harassment.

Blasphemy, Apostasy, and Conversion

The use of blasphemy and apostasy laws continued to be a significant problem, as was the continued proliferation of such laws around the world. Such laws often violate freedoms of religion and expression and often are applied in a discriminatory manner. There were a number of cases of harassment, detention, and abuse in blasphemy and apostasy-related cases in the Middle East and North Africa. In **Saudi Arabia**, there were reports that activists were arrested and charged with apostasy and blasphemy, which carry potential death penalties. Authorities arrested journalist and poet Hamza Kashgari in February 2012 after arranging his forceful repatriation from Malaysia, and arrested journalist and novelist Turki al-Hamad in December 2012 for comments that they made on the social media site Twitter that the government deemed blasphemous. Both remained in detention without charge at year's end. The new constitution in **Egypt** explicitly prohibits insulting or "undermining or subjecting to prejudice all messengers and prophets," whereas in the past demeaning or defaming Islam, Christianity, or Judaism was prohibited by statute. Prosecutors actively pursued cases against those whose statements or actions were alleged to be blasphemous or denigrating of religion. In November and December, in **Libya**, officials reportedly detained ten Ahmadi Muslims, including six Pakistani nationals, for conversion and proselytizing. The group remained in custody at year's end. In **Tunisia**, the government occasionally prosecuted individuals for speech that it deemed

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blasphemous or offensive to the country's Islamic norms. In **Iran**, where blasphemy and apostasy can carry death sentences, the government considers Bahais to be apostates, defines the Bahai Faith as a "political sect," and arbitrarily arrested at least 60 Bahais during the year, with at least 116 incarcerated at year's end. The government required the arrested Bahais to recant their religious affiliation as a precondition for release, or to gain entry to institutes of higher education. In **Eritrea**, a Muslim convert to an unregistered evangelical sect reportedly died after two years in an underground detention facility.

In **Pakistan**, where blasphemy laws have been abused to settle personal disputes and silence legitimate political discourse, authorities imprisoned Rimsha Masih, a mentally disabled Christian girl, for over a month on blasphemy charges until domestic and international condemnation prompted her release in September 2012. The case was dismissed by the Islamabad High Court in November 2012. While abuses under the blasphemy laws have targeted members of religious minorities, such as the case of Pakistani Christian Aasia Bibi, many of those affected were Muslims, including two men who were burned to death by angry mobs in separate incidents in 2012. In **India**, some state governments enforced "anticonversion" laws and authorities reportedly arrested people under these laws during the year, although there were no convictions. Police reportedly arrested four Christians accused of proselytizing in March in Cheechgaon, Madhya Pradesh. Authorities released the four on bail and did not file charges by year's end. In **Indonesia**, there were reports that government officials and police witnessed the coerced conversion to Sunni Islam of dozens of Shia followers in East Java. Violation of the ban on proselytizing carries a maximum five-year prison sentence for blasphemy. In **Sudan**, most non-Muslim groups refrained from public proselytizing due to a vaguely worded law that allowed the government to charge them with supporting apostasy. The government stepped up its efforts to prosecute suspected proselytizers. In October the security services detained several foreign English teachers, who were Christians, on suspicion of proselytizing, which the teachers denied. Authorities held two teachers for several weeks before ultimately deporting them, along with several family members, without court proceedings.

A Continued Rise in Anti-Semitism

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This report also documents a continued global increase in anti-Semitism. Holocaust denial and glorification remained troubling themes, and opposition to Israeli policy at times was used to promote or justify blatant anti-Semitism. When political leaders condoned anti-Semitism, it set the tone for its persistence and growth in countries around the world. Of great concern were expressions of anti-Semitism by government officials, by religious leaders, and by the media, particularly in **Venezuela**, **Egypt**, and **Iran**. At times, such statements led to desecration and violence. In **Venezuela**, the government-controlled media published numerous anti-Semitic statements, particularly in relation to opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, a Catholic with Jewish ancestors. Separately, during an anti-Israel protest in November, a group of individuals gathered outside a synagogue chanting anti-Jewish slogans and throwing fireworks. In **Egypt**, anti-Semitic sentiment in the media was widespread and sometimes included Holocaust denial or glorification. On October 19, President Morsy said “Amen” during televised prayers in Mansour after an imam stated, “Oh Allah ... grant us victory over the infidels. Oh Allah, destroy the Jews and their supporters.” This is a common prayer in Egyptian mosques and came in a litany of other prayers. Also in October, Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mohamed Badei made several anti-Semitic statements, including saying in a sermon that was also published online that “It is time for the Muslim [nation] to unite for the sake of Jerusalem and Palestine after the Jews have increased the corruption in the world....” He added that “Zionists only know the way of force.”

In **Iran**, the government regularly vilified Judaism. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued to question the existence and the scope of the Holocaust, and stated that “a horrendous Zionist clan” had been “ruling the major world affairs” for some 400 years, while Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi publicly blamed the “Zionists” for spreading illegal drugs around the world. In **Tunisia**, Salafists (fundamentalist Sunni Muslims) attacked synagogues and issued anti-Semitic messages, as did some imams during Friday prayer sermons. Certain Salafist imams preached anti-Jewish and anti-Christian messages, including calling for the killing of non-Muslim citizens. Police arrested five persons, including one police officer, for allegedly plotting to kidnap Jews in Zarzis in October for ransom.

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In **Ukraine**, vandals desecrated several Holocaust memorials. In May, in **Russia**, vandals painted a swastika on a St. Petersburg synagogue's fence, and in July, vandals painted a swastika on a synagogue wall in Irkutsk.

Even well into the 21st century, traditional forms of anti-Semitism, such as conspiracy theories, use of the discredited myth of "blood libel," and cartoons demonizing Jews, continued to flourish. An anti-Semitic cartoon appeared in a major newspaper in **Argentina**, and a member of the Golden Dawn party in **Greece** read from the notorious Tsarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, during a parliamentary session. In a worrisome sign, such anti-Semitic and xenophobic parties gained seats in parliaments, and a rise in violent attacks on Jews in Europe included several shocking incidents. **Hungary** saw continued racist commentary by an openly anti-Semitic political party with seats in parliament, the Jobbik Party, and also witnessed an attack on a member of the Jewish community outside of a prayer house in Budapest. In **France**, an Islamist extremist killed a rabbi and his two children, along with another student, outside a Jewish school in Toulouse. While a number of governments took active measures to combat anti-Semitism, this pernicious evil continued to spread.

Societal Violence and Intolerance

Religious freedom can be a bulwark against violent extremism. According to research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, there is a correlation between countries that impose more severe and inappropriate government restrictions on religious freedom and those more prone to sectarian violence. Governments that repress freedom of religion and freedom of expression typically create a climate of intolerance and impunity that emboldens those who foment hatred and violence within society. Government policy that denies citizens the freedom to discuss, debate, practice, and pass on their faith as they see fit also undercuts society's ability to counter and combat the biased and warped interpretations of religion that violent extremists propagate. Societal intolerance increased in many regions during 2012.

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In addition to anti-Semitism, intolerance by members of society towards those of other faiths besides Judaism was a growing problem, and all too often evolved into violence. While Christians were a leading target of societal discrimination, abuse, and violence in some parts of the world, members of other religions, particularly Muslims, suffered as well. Societal groups targeted members of minority branches of Islam and smaller faith groups, often those considered by the majority to be heretical or “foreign.”

In **Pakistan**, where the government maintains intolerant laws, including blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws, there was a rise in sectarian attacks targeting the country’s Shia minority and instances of mob violence against members of the country’s Christian and Hindu minorities. There were scores of attacks on Sufi, Hindu, Christian, Ahmadi Muslim, and Shia Muslim gatherings and religious sites, resulting in numerous deaths and extensive damage. Between January and October, there reportedly were 560 cases of communal violence in **India**, which led to 89 deaths and 1,846 injuries. On March 13, a mob of approximately 20-30 persons attacked four members of Jehovah’s Witnesses who were sharing their religious message with individuals in Vidya Nagara, Shimoga. Also in March, in Sanga Reddy, Medak District, mobs attacked and burned down Muslim properties in a wave of attacks and counterattacks between Hindus and Muslims following allegedly inflammatory Internet postings. During several incidents in Karnataka, local authorities either acted in coordination with, or failed to stop, members of a Hindu nationalist organization, Hindu Jagarana Vedike (HJV), from entering private residences to enforce a morality code based on their interpretation of Hindu traditions, including a desire to keep Hindu and Muslim youths from fraternizing. NGOs alleged that the state government often failed to intervene in such attacks due to sympathy for the HJV’s aims.

In **Iraq**, sectarian violence continued, including criminal and terrorist attacks targeting both Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as members of minority communities. In **Egypt**, sectarian violence continued, with little accountability for the perpetrators. Bahais, Shias, and other minorities faced personal and collective discrimination. In **Libya**, on December 29, an explosion near the Coptic Orthodox Church in Misrata killed two men attending church services, in the first attack

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specifically targeting a church since the 2011 revolution. Salafist groups attacked Sufi religious sites across the country, destroying several mosques and tombs of Sufi religious leaders and scholars. In August, in downtown Tripoli, the Sidi Sha'ab Mosque was attacked and destroyed with heavy construction equipment in broad daylight. A video on the Internet in March showed armed Muslim men in the British military cemetery in Benghazi desecrating Christian and Jewish headstones and attempting to destroy a large crucifix with sledge hammers. In **Tunisia**, Salafists attacked targets they deemed “un-Islamic,” such as a Russian Orthodox Church, synagogues, dozens of Sufi shrines, and events they associated with Shia Islam. In **Nigeria**, Boko Haram extremists violently murdered hundreds of Christians and Muslims during the year. The group often targeted political and ethnic rivals, religious leaders, businesses, homes, police stations, military installations, churches, mosques, and rural villages, using assault rifles, bombs, suicide car bombings, and suicide vests. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for many of the 15 church attacks that killed more than 150 people, including scores of Christians, during worship services. Some Muslim and Christian religious leaders alleged that Boko Haram sought to incite hostilities between Muslims and Christians and to spark reprisals in the Northern and Middle Belt states, where local laws, discriminatory employment practices, and fierce competition for land exacerbated communal tensions. In **Mali**, violent extremist groups ousted rebels who had seized control of the northern two-thirds of the country, destroyed religious monuments, and imposed their own interpretation of Sharia law. In **Sri Lanka**, Buddhists launched sporadic violent attacks on Christian churches and continued to allege forced or deceitful conversions, which created societal tension. Growing intolerance of and discrimination against Muslims by some Buddhists increased.

The Problem of Impunity

In many parts of the world, government officials, no matter how serious the offense, often acted with impunity, abusing individuals for holding or expressing their beliefs without being called to account by courts or government authorities. Governments exacerbated religious tensions within society through discriminatory laws and rhetoric, fomenting violence, fostering a climate of impunity, and failing to ensure the rule of law. In several instances of communal attacks on members of

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religious minorities and their property, police reportedly arrested the victims of such attacks, and NGOs alleged that there were instances in which police protected the attackers rather than the victims. As a result, government officials were not the only ones to commit abuses with impunity. Impunity for actions committed by individuals and groups within society was often a corollary of government impunity.

In **Egypt**, the government generally failed to prevent, investigate, or prosecute crimes against members of religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, which fostered a climate of impunity. In some cases, authorities reacted slowly or with insufficient resolve when mobs attacked Christians and their property. In **Pakistan**, authorities made few arrests in cases of sectarian attacks against Shias, Hindus, or Christians. Despite constitutional protections for religious belief, authorities initiated few investigations and arrests for acts of religious violence. In **India**, the government at times failed to respond effectively to abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens. Some local police and enforcement agencies failed to respond effectively to communal violence, including attacks against members of religious minorities. Authorities did not efficiently or effectively prosecute those who attacked members of such groups, and in several instances police reportedly arrested the victims and protected the attackers. In **Libya** and **Tunisia**, government investigations of attacks on religious sites resulted in arrests and prosecutions in only a minority of cases.

In April, in **Sudan**, rioters in Khartoum brushed aside inadequate local police forces and burned an evangelical church compound used by a mix of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Sudanese worshippers. The authorities did not charge any of the attackers by year's end. In **Nigeria**, the government did not act swiftly or effectively to quell communal violence or to investigate and prosecute those responsible for such violence and for abusing religious freedom. Federal, state, and local authorities did not effectively address underlying political, economic, ethnic, and religious grievances leading to violence. An atmosphere of impunity existed, as authorities rarely investigated, prosecuted, and punished those responsible for violent attacks and sometimes responded to violence with heavy-handed tactics. In **Burma**, there were reports of sexual violence by Burmese army

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officials in houses of worship in ethnic minority areas. The government did not hold these officials accountable. In May, a Burmese news source reported the gang-rape and prolonged torture of a Christian woman in the sanctuary of a church near the Kachin-China border town of Pan Wa. According to a Kachin women's organization, about ten soldiers beat, stabbed, and raped the woman over a period of three days without penalty. In **Indonesia**, the government sometimes did not take adequate measures to prevent violence, abuse, and discrimination against individuals based on their religious belief. Militant groups and mobs throughout the country attacked, vandalized, forced to close, or prevented from being established several houses of worship, religious schools, and homes of Muslims regarded as unorthodox. In several cases, police temporarily detained members of "deviant groups" who were victims of attacks, ostensibly to ensure their safety, but did not arrest their attackers.

Countries of Particular Concern

A key requirement of the International Religious Freedom Act is the designation of Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs), i.e., those countries that are considered to commit "particularly severe violations of religious freedom," and whose records call for the U.S. government to take certain actions under the terms of the Act. The term "particularly severe violations of religious freedom" means systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom, including violations such as: (a) torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; (b) prolonged detention without charges; (c) causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those persons; or (d) other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons.

In making the decision to designate a particular country as a CPC, the Secretary of State also considers the recommendations of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). USCIRF, which was established under the Act, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF reviews the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. The Department of State carefully considers USCIRF's advice, along

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with all other available information, and the Secretary of State then makes the final decision on CPC designation.

The Secretary of State designated eight countries in August 2011 as CPCs, based on the status of religious freedom in each, and the particularly severe violations of religious freedom committed by these governments. This status and these violations are summarized in the following paragraphs, which briefly updates the situation in each country during 2012.

Burma: Since 1999, **Burma** has been designated as a CPC, and the Secretary of State redesignated the country in August 2011. In connection with this designation, the United States has an ongoing embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1 (a). The U.S. government maintains this embargo on the country for its continuing violations of religious freedom. The constitution and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom and in practice the government enforced those restrictions. The government implemented considerable political reforms, but the trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. Some local government officials in Rakhine state reportedly took part in ethnic and religious violence that erupted in June, which largely targeted the Muslim community. The government maintained restrictions on certain religious activities, limited freedom of religion, and actively promoted Theravada Buddhism over other religions, particularly among certain ethnic minority populations. Authorities subjected religious activities and organizations to restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The government continued to monitor the meetings and activities of religious organizations.

China: The Secretary of State designated **China** as a CPC in 1999, and renewed the designation most recently in August 2011. The Secretary of State extended existing economic measures in effect against the country under the Act related to restrictions on exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246). The government emphasized state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived, even potentially, to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party interests, including the

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Party's concept of social stability. The government's respect for religious freedom declined during the year, particularly in Tibetan areas and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The government harassed, detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison a number of religious adherents for activities reportedly related to their religious beliefs and practice. The government continued to strictly regulate the religious activities of Uighur Muslims. Government repression, including crackdowns at monasteries and nunneries, resulted in the loss of life, arbitrary detentions, and torture.

Eritrea: The Secretary of State designated **Eritrea** as a CPC in 2004, and renewed the designation most recently in August 2011. The CPC-associated assistance restrictions continue. The government only partially implemented constitutional provisions for religious freedom, and did so only for the four officially registered religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, over which it still retained influence. The government's overall record on religious freedom was poor and that trend did not change significantly during the year. The government continued to detain members of unregistered religious groups, although there were reportedly fewer such detentions than in 2011. The government enforced mandatory military service for all, with no options for conscientious objectors. Failure to comply resulted in discrimination and violent punishment. The government detained many religious prisoners in harsh conditions.

Iran: Since 1999, the United States has designated **Iran** as a CPC. In August 2011, the Secretary of State redesignated Iran, and redesignated the existing restrictions on certain imports from and exports to the country, in accordance with section 103(b) of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. Iran's constitution and other laws and policies do not protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government severely restricted this right. The government's respect for religious freedom declined during the year. There were increased reports that the government charged religious and ethnic minorities with moharebeh (enmity against God), "anti-Islamic propaganda," or vague national security crimes for

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their religious activities. Those reportedly arrested on religious grounds faced worsening prison conditions and treatment, including physical and mental abuse. The arrest and harassment of members of religious minorities also increased significantly. There continued to be reports that the government imprisoned, harassed, intimidated, and discriminated against people because of their religious beliefs. Authorities reportedly subjected U.S.-Iranian citizen and Christian pastor Saeed Abedini to physical and psychological abuse, and his family, friends, and lawyer reportedly faced harassment by officials. The government prohibits Bahais from teaching and practicing their faith and subjects them to many forms of discrimination not faced by members of other religious groups.

North Korea: **North Korea** was first designated as a CPC in 2001, and most recently redesignated by the Secretary of State in August 2011. As required under the Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions to which the country is subject pursuant to sections 402(c)(5) and 409 of the Trade Act of 1974 (the Jackson-Vanik Amendment). Although the constitution and other laws and policies provide for religious freedom, in practice the government severely restricted religious activity, except for some officially recognized groups that the government tightly supervised. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. Genuine religious freedom does not exist. Government practices continued to interfere with individuals' ability to choose and to manifest their religious beliefs. The government continued to repress the religious activities of unauthorized religious groups. Reports by refugees, defectors, missionaries, and NGOs indicated that authorities arrested and subjected to harsh penalties religious persons who engaged in proselytizing in the country and those who were in contact with foreigners or missionaries.

Saudi Arabia: **Saudi Arabia** has been a CPC since 2004. In connection with the Secretary of State's redesignation in August 2011, the Secretary issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the act." Freedom of religion in Saudi Arabia is neither recognized nor protected under the law and the government severely restricted it in practice. Sunni Islam is the official religion and the country's constitution is the Quran and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not

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change significantly during the year. The public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited. Authorities beheaded at least one individual for engaging in “sorcery.” The government generally permitted Shia religious gatherings and non-Muslim private religious practices. Some Muslims who did not adhere to the government’s interpretation of Islam faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship. The government continued to revise school textbooks, removing some objectionable content; however, significant objectionable content remains.

Sudan: The Secretary of State first designated **Sudan** as a CPC in 1999, and most recently redesignated it in August 2011. Consequently, the country was ineligible for aid under Section 116 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. Sudan’s Interim National Constitution (INC) and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced legal and policy restrictions on this right. The trend in the government’s respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. The government at times enforced laws against blasphemy and defaming Islam. Authorities harassed religious practitioners of unregistered groups and limited the freedom of the four registered religious groups. There were instances of abuse and mistreatment. The security services detained foreign English teachers on suspicion of proselytizing, and ultimately deported them, along with several family members, without court proceedings. State governments and local authorities razed two churches.

Uzbekistan: The Secretary of State first designated **Uzbekistan** as a CPC in November 2006, and redesignated it in August 2011. In connection with this designation, the Secretary of State issued a waiver of sanctions to “further the purposes of the act.” The constitution and some laws provide for religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these restrictions. The trend in the government’s respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. The law restricts the religious freedom of unregistered groups and prohibits many activities, such as proselytizing; many members of registered and

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unregistered minority religious groups faced heavy fines and short jail terms for violations of these laws. The government continued to deal harshly with Muslims who discussed religious issues outside of sanctioned mosques. The government continued to imprison individuals based on charges of extremism; raid religious and social gatherings of unregistered and registered religious communities; confiscate and destroy religious literature, including holy books; and discourage minors from practicing their faith. There were numerous reports of beatings and mistreatment of prisoners serving sentences for religious convictions.

Nongovernmental sources reported that authorities severely mistreated persons arrested on suspicion of “religious extremism” or participating in underground Islamic activity, citing torture, beatings, and harsh prison conditions. Family members of prisoners reported deaths in custody of prisoners serving sentences on charges related to what the government considered “religious extremism.” Family members typically reported that the body of the prisoner showed signs of beating or other abuse, but authorities pressured them to bury the body before a medical professional could examine it. The February 2012 death of Abdurahmon Sagdiev, sentenced in 1999 to 16.5 years in prison for membership in Hizb-ut-Tahrir, fit this pattern; local officials asserted that he died as a result of a beating administered by fellow inmates.

U.S. Policy and Programs in Support of Religious Freedom

The Department of State, our missions abroad, and especially the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, leverage the various tools of the U.S. government to promote and protect religious liberty around the world. Led in these efforts by the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, we use bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, public diplomacy, reporting, CPC designations, and foreign assistance programming to assist members of religious minorities, increase societal respect for religious freedom, highlight abuses, and monitor and combat anti-Semitism.

The Obama Administration has prioritized integrating religious freedom and religion writ large into the U.S. government’s broader foreign policy objectives. Specifically, the Department of State has emphasized freedom of religion and protection of members of religious minorities by: 1) encouraging accountability

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for religious-based violence and ensuring the protection of citizens and places of worship; 2) urging governments to adopt legal protections for religious freedom and minorities and to amend or rescind unduly and inappropriately restrictive laws; and 3) promoting societal respect for religious freedom and diversity.

Officers at U.S. missions abroad meet regularly with government officials and representatives of religious groups, both large and small, to discuss religious freedom. U.S. officials criticize unjust laws and proposed laws, intervene on behalf of persecuted individuals, help religious groups get registered, protest offensive statements by government officials, and mediate conflicts among religious groups. For example, in **China**, the embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan regularly urged government officials at the central and local levels to implement stronger protections for religious freedom. In **Russia**, embassy officials expressed concern about alleged abuses of the anti-extremism law. In **Vietnam**, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom visited the country in May, raised religious freedom issues with senior government officials, and met with religious leaders of multiple faiths, both those recognized and not recognized by the government.

Embassy and consulate officers actively support those who work for a better climate for interfaith cooperation. Embassy officials maintain active relationships with NGOs, and embassies often host meetings with political and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom issues. For example, in **India**, embassy and consular officials engaged Islamic schools and other educational institutions directly and through exchange programs on topics such as religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity. In **Sweden**, embassy staff visited Malmo to assess multicultural tensions, in particular the situation of the Jewish community, and the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism raised anti-Semitism and intolerance directly with the mayor of Malmo and other government officials, with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities, and with members of the Interreligious Dialogue Forum. In the **Philippines**, the embassy's Mindanao Working Group coordinated mission-wide efforts in Mindanao, and held discussions with religious and civil society leaders. During trips to conflict-

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affected areas of Mindanao, embassy representatives organized discussions with religious group leaders to promote mutual understanding. In **Ukraine**, the embassy maintained contact with local authorities in Lviv to follow progress toward resolution of disputes related to construction on the site of the city's former main synagogue (destroyed during the Holocaust), possible destruction of remaining historic buildings, and the status of the historic Jewish cemetery located on the grounds of the Krakivskiy market in Lviv. The embassy also stayed in contact with local religious and political leaders regarding the status of Jewish cemeteries in Chortkiv, Kremenets, and Lviv, and monitored cases involving discrimination against Tatars in Crimea. In **Uzbekistan**, U.S. government representatives frequently and directly engaged with the host government on religious freedom, including during the March visit of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and the August annual bilateral consultations, during which discussion of religious freedom issues played a major part. In November, the embassy sponsored a study tour by a group of young Muslim leaders to learn about the role of Islam and interfaith dialogue in the United States.

The United States works through multilateral as well as bilateral channels to promote increased respect for religious freedom, and also funds NGO programs designed to achieve this goal. In the multilateral arena, the United States continued to follow up on the UN Human Rights Council's March 2011 adoption of resolution 16/18 on "Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence Against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief." This resolution focuses on concrete, positive measures that states can take to combat religious intolerance, rather than pursuing legal measures to restrict speech, including religious expression. The U.S. government continues to work with its international partners to further this strong stand for freedom of expression and worship, and against discrimination and violence based upon religion or belief.

We continue to focus foreign assistance funds on programs that promote religious freedom and combat anti-Semitism around the world. Projects include a rapid response program to provide emergency assistance to victims of religious persecution, a program that works with madrassahs to advance curriculum reform

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to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism, and a regional strategy linking religious freedom and other human rights with stability and combating violent extremism. We also have programs that promote interfaith cooperation and mutual respect through joint action programs, and others that advance the political rights and representation of members of religious minorities. Our programs are helping foreign governments review textbooks, curricula, and teacher training materials to identify and remove content that is biased, intolerant, and inflames sectarian tension. We also have a program that provides training to government officials in all areas of the world on engagement and cultural awareness with members of religious minorities, and on enforcing nondiscrimination laws.

Conclusion

As Secretary of State John Kerry said in Berlin in January, “as a country, as a society, we live and breathe the idea of religious freedom and religious tolerance, whatever the religion....” The U.S. government will continue to do its utmost to promote respect for religious freedom wherever it is endangered. This report does not stand by itself. It is supported by the concrete efforts of America’s diplomats all over the globe who will remain vigilant, who will continue to shine a spotlight on abuses wherever they exist, and who will use all the tools at our disposal to encourage, support, and protect those whose religious liberty is threatened.