

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion but prohibits discrimination based on religious belief, and the Government generally respects religious freedom in practice; however, there were some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Islam is the only state-sanctioned religion, and the law limits the practice of other faiths; however, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance of non-Muslim faiths by not inquiring into the religious practices of individuals. Self-proclaimed Muslim terrorists continue to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts; however, the level of violence perpetrated by terrorists continued to decline during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. A very small number of citizens, such as Ibadi Muslims found in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice non-mainstream forms of Islam or practice other religions, and there is minimal societal discrimination against them.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom 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 land area of 6,406,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 31,736,000. The vast majority of citizens belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. Official data on the number of non-Muslim residents is not available. Many citizens who practice non-Muslim faiths have fled the country due to the civil unrest; as a result, the number of Christians and Jews in the country is significantly lower than the estimated total before 1992. The small Christian community, which is predominantly Roman Catholic, has approximately 25,000 members, and the Jewish community numbers perhaps fewer than 100 persons. There are no reliable figures on the numbers of atheists in the country, and very few persons identify themselves as such.

For security reasons, due mainly to the 10-year civil conflict, both Christians and Jews concentrated in Algiers and the larger cities of Constantine and Oran in the mid-1990s. There also is a Christian community in the eastern region of Kabylie.

There is only one missionary group operating in the country on a full-time basis. Other evangelical groups travel to and from the country but are not established. While Christians do not proselytize actively, they report that conversions take place without government sanction or interference.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion but prohibits discrimination based on religious belief, and the Government generally respects this prohibition in practice, with some limited exceptions. Islam is the state religion, and the law limits the practice of other faiths; however, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by not inquiring into the religious practices of individuals. The small Christian and Jewish populations generally practice their faiths without government interference. Missionary groups are permitted to conduct humanitarian activities without government interference as long as they are discreet and do not proselytize. Most of the "home churches" in which Christians worship are in contact with the Government, and none report being intimidated or threatened.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government appoints imams to mosques and provides general guidance on sermons. The Government monitors activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses. Amendments to the Penal Code, which became law on June 27, 2001, established strict punishments, including fines and prison sentences, for anyone other than a government-designated imam who preaches in a mosque. Harsher punishments were established for any person, including government-designated imams, if such persons act “against the noble nature of the mosque” or act in a manner “likely to offend public cohesion.” The amendments do not specify what actions would constitute such acts. There were no reported cases in which the Government invoked the new amendments by the end of the period covered by this report. The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides some financial support to mosques and has limited control over the training of imams.

The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. However, Roman Catholic churches, including a cathedral in Algiers (the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference. In 1994 the size of the Jewish community diminished significantly due to fear of terrorist violence, and its synagogue since has been abandoned. There are only a few smaller churches and other places of worship; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services.

Islamic (Shari’a) law does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion; however, conversion is not illegal under civil law. Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. Due to safety concerns and potential legal and social problems, Muslim converts practice their new faith clandestinely (see Section III). While they do not proselytize actively, Christians report that conversions to Christianity take place without government sanction or interference.

Non-Islamic proselytizing is illegal, and the Government restricts the importation of non-Islamic literature for widespread distribution. Personal copies of the major works of other religions, such as the Bible, may be brought into the country. Occasionally such works are sold in local bookstores in Algiers, and in general non-Islamic religious texts no longer are difficult to find. Non-Islamic religious music and video selections also are available. The Government prohibits the dissemination of any literature that portrays violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

Because Islam is the state religion, the country’s education system is structured to benefit Muslims. Education is free to all citizens below the age of 16, and the study of Islam is a strict requirement in the public schools, which are regulated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Both private primary and private secondary schools operate in the country; however, private school students find it more difficult than other students to register for official national examinations.

Some aspects of Shari’a as interpreted and applied in the country discriminate against women. The 1984 Family Code, which is based in large part on Shari’a, treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. For example, a woman must obtain a father’s approval to marry. Divorce is difficult for a wife to obtain except in cases of abandonment or the husband’s conviction for a serious crime. Husbands generally keep the right to the family’s home in the case of divorce. Custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she may not enroll them in a school or take them out of the country without the father’s authorization. Only males are able to confer citizenship on their children. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims; Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women.

Women also suffer from discrimination in inheritance claims; in accordance with Shari’a, women are entitled to a smaller portion of a deceased husband’s estate than are his male children or his brothers. According to Shari’a, such a distinction is justified because other provisions require that the husband’s income and assets be used to support the family, while the wife’s income and assets remain her own. Women may take out business loans and are the sole custodians of their dowries. However, in practice women do not always have exclusive control over assets that they bring to a marriage or income that they earn themselves. Females under 19 years of age may not travel abroad without the permission of a male legal guardian.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The country’s 10-year civil conflict has pitted self-proclaimed radical Muslims against moderate Muslims. Approximately 100,000 civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past 10 years. Extremist Self-proclaimed Islamists have issued public threats against all “infidels” in the country, both foreigners and citizens, and have killed both Muslims and non-Muslims, including missionaries. Extremists continued attacks against both the Government and moderate

Muslim and secular civilians; however, the level of violence perpetrated by these terrorists continued to decline during the period covered by this report. There were 313 civilian deaths due to terrorism in the first 6 months of 2002, compared with 483 civilians killed in the same period in 2001. These figures contrast with more than 1,000 killings per month several years ago. The majority of the country's terrorist groups, as a rule, do not differentiate between religious and political killings. In the majority of cases during the period covered by this report in which both security forces and civilians died at the hands of terrorists, the preferred methods of assault were knifings (particularly throat slitting) and shootings. Terrorists, often claiming religious justification for their actions, set up roadblocks to kill civilians and security force personnel.

During the period covered by this report, an indeterminate number of persons were serving prison sentences due to their alleged Islamist sympathies or membership in Islamist groups that commit or endorse terrorists acts; however, there were no reports of cases in which it was clear that persons were arrested or detained based solely on their religious beliefs.

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

In general noncitizens who practice faiths other than Islam enjoy a high level of tolerance within society; however, citizens who renounce Islam generally are ostracized by their families and shunned by their neighbors. The Government generally does not become involved in such disputes. Converts also expose themselves to the risk of attack by radical extremists. On March 25, 2002, an international symposium on *Rapprochement* among the Islamic Rites was held in Algiers. Topics discussed include terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and women's rights.

The majority of cases of harassment and security threats against non-Muslims come from radical Islamists who are determined to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam (see Section II). However, a majority of the population subscribes to Islamic precepts of tolerance in religious beliefs. Moderate Islamist religious and political leaders have criticized publicly acts of violence committed in the name of Islam.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. However, because of security-based restrictions on movement and a staff one-third the normal size, the Embassy could not maintain regular contact with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Nevertheless, the Embassy maintained contact with leaders of the Muslim community through the two leading Islamist political parties, *Ennahda* and the *Movement of Society for Peace*.

The U.S. Embassy maintained frequent contact with the National Observatory for Human Rights (ONDH), a quasigovernmental institution that was established by the Government in response to international and domestic pressure to improve its human rights record. Wherever possible, the Embassy helped to augment the ONDH's ability to address human rights abuses. In September 2001, the ONDH was replaced with a new organization, the Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CCNPPDH). The Embassy actively sought and maintained contact with this organization and its leadership.

The Embassy maintained strong and close contact with religious leaders in the non-Muslim community, who cite the dangers posed by radical Islamists as their principal concern regarding the safe practice of their faith. The Embassy maintains contact with several moderate Islamist organizations, including a social service non-governmental organization and a scholarly institute.

BAHRAIN

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political

dissent, including from religious groups or leaders; however, in February 2001, the Amir pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders. Also in 2001, the Government registered new religious nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), including some with legal authority to conduct political activities. In February 2002, the King issued a new Constitution and announced May 2002 municipal council elections and October 2002 National Assembly elections. Candidates associated with religious political societies reportedly won 40 of the 50 municipal council seats contested in the May 2002 election. Candidates from religious political societies conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there is some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government.

Relations among religions in society generally are amicable; however, Shi'a Muslims, who constitute the majority of the population, sometimes resent minority Sunni Muslim rule.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom 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 231 square miles, and its population is approximately 660,000. The citizen population is 98 percent Muslim; Jews and Christians constitute the remaining 2 percent. Muslim citizens belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting as much as two-thirds of the indigenous population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries, constitute approximately 38 percent of the total population. Roughly half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

There is no information available regarding the numbers of atheists in the country.

The American Mission Hospital, which is affiliated with the National Evangelical Church, has operated in the country for more than a century. The church adjacent to the hospital holds weekly services and also serves as a meeting place for other Protestant denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent, including from religious groups or leaders; however, in February 2001 the King pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders, including Shi'a clerics. In 2001 the Government also registered new religious NGO's, including some with the legal authority to conduct political activities. In February 2002, the King issued a new Constitution and announced May 2002 municipal council elections and October National Assembly elections. Candidates associated with religious political societies reportedly won 40 of the 50 municipal council seats contested in the May 2002 election. During the election, candidates from religious political societies conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there is some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government, and are permitted to maintain their own places of worship and display the symbols of their religion.

Every religious group must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Justice and Islamic affairs in order to operate. Depending on circumstances, a religious group also may need approvals from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Education (if the religious group wants to run a school). In 2001 the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar India, which is affiliated with the U.S. Episcopal Church, applied for authority to build its own church building; however, by the end of the period covered by this report, the local parish leader had not received permission from all Government authorities to begin work. Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; there were no reports of religious groups being denied a permit. At least one religious event was held without a permit, and after this event, the Government took no action against the event's sponsor.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs is charged with the review and approval of all clerical appointments within both the Sunni and Shi'a communities, and maintains program oversight for all citizens studying religion abroad.

The civil and criminal legal systems consist of a complex mix of courts based on diverse legal sources, including Sunni and Shi'a Shari'a (Islamic law), tribal law, and other civil codes and regulations.

The Shi'a religious celebration of Ashura is a 2-day national holiday. The Shi'a stage large public processions during the holiday. The King ordered the Ministry of Information to provide full media coverage of 2002 Ashura events.

Notable dignitaries from virtually every religion and denomination visit the country and frequently meet with the Government and civic leaders.

In 1999 Amir Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa publicly called for religious tolerance, and in November 1999, he met with Pope John Paul II and established diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government funds, monitors, and closely controls all official religious institutions. These include Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a Ma'tams (community centers), Shi'a and Sunni Waqfs (charitable foundations), and the religious courts, which represent both the Ja'afari (Shi'a) and Maliki (Sunni) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. While the Government rarely interferes with what it considers legitimate religious observations, in the past it actively has suppressed any activity deemed overtly political in nature. The Government permits public religious events, most notably the large annual commemorative marches by Shi'a, but such events are monitored closely by the police.

In the past, the Government occasionally closed mosques and Ma'tams for allowing political demonstrations to take place on or near their premises or to prevent religious leaders from delivering political speeches during Friday prayer and sermons; however, there were no reported closures of mosques or Ma'tams during the period covered by this report. In past years, the Government detained religious leaders for delivering political sermons or for allowing such sermons to be delivered in their mosques. The Government also has appropriated or withheld funding in order to reward or punish particular individuals or places of worship. However, there were no reports of such detentions or funding restrictions during the period covered by this report.

The Government discourages proselytizing by non-Muslims and prohibits anti-Islamic writings. However, Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookstores that also sell Islamic and other religious literature. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religions readily are available. However, a government-controlled proxy server prohibits user access to Internet sites considered to be antigovernment or anti-Islamic. The software used is unreliable and often inhibits access to uncontroversial sites as well.

There are no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In the past, stateless residents who did not possess Bahraini passports had difficulties arranging travel to religious sites abroad. However, the Government addressed this problem during the period covered by this report by granting citizenship to between 9,000 and 15,000 previously stateless residents. The Government monitors travel to Iran and scrutinizes carefully those who choose to pursue religious study there.

Although there are notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. Sunnis predominate because of the patronage of a Sunni ruling family that is supported by the armed forces, the security service, and powerful Sunni and Shi'a merchant families. Sunnis receive preference for employment in sensitive government positions and in the managerial ranks of the civil service. Shi'a citizens are not allowed to hold significant posts in the defense and internal security forces. However, since April 1999, Shi'a have been allowed to be employed in the enlisted ranks of the Bahrain Defense Force and with the Ministry of the Interior, two bodies in which Shi'a had been denied employment during previous years.

The political dynamic of Sunni predominance in the past has led to incidents of unrest between the Shi'a community and the Government. There were no reports of significant political or religious unrest during the period covered by this report.

Shari'a governs the personal legal rights of women, although the new Constitution provides for women's political rights. Specific rights vary according to Shi'a or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law, as determined by the individual's faith, or by the courts in which various contracts, including marriage, have been made. While both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to initiate a divorce, religious courts may refuse the request. Although local religious courts may grant a divorce to Shi'a

women in routine cases, occasionally Shi'a women seeking divorce under unusual circumstances must travel abroad to seek a higher ranking opinion than that available in the country. Women of either branch of Islam may own and inherit property and may represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shi'a woman may inherit all property. In contrast, a Sunni woman—in the absence of a direct male heir—inherits only a portion as governed by Shari'a; the balance is divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased. A Muslim woman legally may marry a non-Muslim man if the man converts to Islam. In such marriages, the children automatically are considered to be Muslim.

In divorce cases, the courts routinely grant Shi'a and Sunni women custody of daughters under the age of 9 and sons under age 7, although custody usually reverts to the father once the children reach those ages. In all circumstances except mental incapacitation, the father, regardless of custody decisions, retains the right to make certain legal decisions for his children, such as guardianship of any property belonging to the child, until the child reaches legal age. A noncitizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Until February 14, 2001, the Government held in detention hundreds of Shi'a, including religious leaders, for offenses involving "national security." In June 1999, the Government gradually began releasing incarcerated individuals as part of an Amiri decree calling for the release or pardon of more than 350 Shi'a political prisoners, detainees, and exiles. In December 1999 and during 2000, the Amir pardoned at least another 350 such prisoners. By February 2001, the Amir had pardoned and released all political prisoners, detainees, and exiles, including Hassan Sultan and Haji Hassan Jasrallah, two Shi'a clerics associated with prominent cleric Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, as well as Shi'a political activists Haasan Mushaimaa and Abdul Wahab Hussein, who had been in detention for more than 5 years.

On March 8, 2001, Shaikh Issa Qassim, a cleric and the former head of the Shi'a Religious Party, returned to the country after an 8-year exile. The Government permitted large crowds of celebrating Shi'a to greet Qassim upon his return.

In July 1999, the Amir pardoned prominent Shi'a cleric Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, who had been in prison since 1996. Following his release, the Government monitored Al-Jamri's movements. It also denied him the right to issue marital status certificates, a lucrative source of income for many clerics. However, since January 2001, the Government has ceased conducting surveillance of Al-Jamri's residence and permitted him to lead Friday noon prayers. During 2001 Al-Jamri also delivered sermons at various mosques in Manama whose texts were published in local newspapers. Al-Jamri also served as a founding member of Al-Wifaq, one of four NGO's authorized to conduct political activities.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners during the period covered by this report whose imprisonment could be attributed solely to the practice of their religion.

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

Although there are notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. In the private sector, Shi'a tend to be employed in lower paid, less skilled jobs. Educational, social, and municipal services in most Shi'a neighborhoods, particularly in rural villages, are inferior to those found in Sunni urban communities. In an effort to remedy social discrimination, the Government has built numerous subsidized housing complexes, which are open to all citizens on the basis of financial need. In order to ease both the housing shortage and strains on the national budget, in 1997 the Government revised its policy to permit lending institutions to finance mortgages on apartment units.

Converts from Islam to other religions are not well tolerated by society, but some small groups worship in their homes.

On May 15, 2002, 70 graves at the St. Christopher's Church graveyard were desecrated. Crosses were uprooted and broken and headstones were smashed, making identification of some graves impossible. The King promised to restore the graveyard, and also to transform it into a monument to the country's history of Christian-Muslim relations. After demonstrations in support of Palestinians on October 2000, several youths and men reportedly boarded a bus carrying Catholic parishioners,

took Bibles from the parishioners, and threw some of the Bibles out of the bus windows.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

An official written dialog takes place between U.S. Embassy officials and government contacts on matters of religion. One such example is the memorandum received by the Embassy each year from the Government in response to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on this right. Under the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion and the primary source of legislation. Accordingly religious practices that conflict with Islamic law (Shari'a) are prohibited. However, in Egypt the practice of Christianity or Judaism does not conflict with Shari'a and, for the most part, members of the non-Muslim minority worship without harassment and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries.

With some exceptions, there was a continued trend toward improvement in the Government's respect for and protection of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. There were some Government abuses and restrictions on the right to religious freedom. The Government continued to prosecute for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices under the charge of "insulting heavenly religions." Two men were convicted on that charge by a State Security Emergency Court in November 2001 (sentenced to 5 and 3 years in prison respectively), as were 8 persons in March 2002 (sentences ranged from 3 years in prison to suspended sentences). In May 2002, a group of 21 persons were referred to trial in a State Security Emergency Court on the same charge; the trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. A group of 18 Egyptian Baha'is arrested in early 2001 on suspicion of insulting religion were released without charge after having been detained several months. Two non-Egyptian Scientologists arrested in December 2001 were charged with insulting religion, but then released on bail and deported in May 2002. Nevertheless, there was a significant increase in public intercommunal dialogue, as well as in press and public discussion of intercommunal relations and religious discrimination. In addition the Government reacted more effectively than in the past to contain intercommunal violence, for example to the burning of a church in the southern province of Minya in February 2002.

Religious discrimination and occasional sectarian tension in society are problems about which many citizens agree more needs to be done; however, many argue that development of the economy, polity, and society is the most effective and enduring way to abolish prejudice. In November 2001, a criminal court in Sohag began the retrial of 96 defendants suspected of crimes committed while participating in violence in the village of Al-Kush in January 2000 that resulted in the deaths of 20 Christians and 1 Muslim; the trial was ongoing as of the end of June 2002. Ninety-two of 96 were acquitted in the first trial in February 2001, a verdict successfully appealed by the Public Prosecutor. In February 2002, Muslims in the village of Bani Walimss attacked a newly reconstructed church during a reconsecration ceremony, doing extensive damage by fire; the Government ordered the damage repaired at Government expense.

The subject of religious freedom remains an important and active part of the bilateral dialog between the U.S. and Egyptian Governments. Senior Administration officials, the U.S. Ambassador, and members of Congress have raised U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with President Hosni Mubarak and other senior government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 370,308 square miles, and its population is approximately 68 million. Most citizens, approximately 90 percent, are Sunni Muslims. There is a small number of Shi'a Muslims who constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Approximately 8 to 10 percent of the population are Christians, the majority of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Other Christian communities include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian Catholic), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) Church-

es. An evangelical Protestant church, first established in the middle of the 19th century, has grown to a community of 17 Protestant denominations. There also are followers of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960's. The non-Muslim, non-Coptic Orthodox communities range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. The number of Baha'is has been estimated at between several hundred and a few thousand. The Jewish community numbers fewer than 200 persons. There are very few declared atheists.

Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians tends to be higher in upper (southern) Egypt and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign missionary groups that work within the country, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants who have had a presence in the country for 100 years or more, although their mission involves education more than proselytizing. The Government generally tolerates missionary groups if they do not proselytize actively.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on this right. Under the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion and the primary source of legislation. Accordingly religious practices that conflict with Shari'a are prohibited; however, the practice of Christianity or Judaism is not considered to conflict with Shari'a and, in general, members of the non-Muslim minority worship without harassment and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries.

The Constitution requires schools to offer religious instruction. Public and private schools provide religious instruction according to the faith of the student.

The religious establishment of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) engage in interfaith discussions both domestically and abroad. First Lady Suzanne Mubarak has supported the development of reading and other curricular materials that advocate tolerance, which are distributed under her patronage by literacy projects aimed at children and adults, such as a "Reading for All" festival that was held during 2001.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

All mosques must be licensed, and the Government is engaged in an effort to control them legally in a proclaimed effort to combat extremists. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques and monitors their sermons. In June 2002, the Minister of Awqaf announced that of the more than 80,000 mosques in the country, the Government controls administratively 60,000 regular mosques and 15,000 mosques located in private buildings. The Minister said that the Government hoped to control all mosques by the end of 2003.

An 1856 Ottoman decree still in force requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build a place of worship. In addition Interior Ministry regulations issued in 1934 specify a set of 10 conditions that the Government must consider prior to issuance of a presidential decree permitting construction of a church. These conditions include the location of the proposed site, the religious composition of the surrounding community, and the proximity of other churches. The Ottoman decree also requires the President to approve permits for the repair of church facilities.

In December 1999, in response to strong criticism of the Ottoman decree, President Mubarak issued a decree making the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. The decree is significant symbolically because it places churches and mosques on equal footing before the law. The practical impact of the decree has been to facilitate significantly church repairs. However, Christians claim that local permits still are subject to security authorities' approval. During the period covered by this report, the President approved a total of 23 permits for church-related construction, including 2 permits for the construction of new churches; 2 permits for demolition and reconstruction of churches; 10 permits for churches previously constructed without authorization, 8 permits for construction of additional church facilities; and 1 permit for cemetery construction. This generally represented a decrease from previous years.

The approval process for church construction continued to be time-consuming and insufficiently responsive to the wishes of the Christian community. Although President Mubarak reportedly has approved all requests for permits presented to him, Christians maintain that the Interior Ministry delays—in some instances indefinitely—submission to the President of their requests. They also maintain that security forces have blocked them from using permits that have been issued, and that

local security officials at times blocked or delayed permits for repairs to church buildings. During the summer of 2000, newspapers published a May 22, 2000 letter from the secretary general of Assiyut governorate to the head of the Assiyut council directing that all church repair requests be screened by security before being approved. In March 2001, President Mubarak ordered the reconstruction at Government expense of two church buildings in Qalyubia that had been demolished by local authorities. However, by the end of June 2002, one of the buildings had not yet been rebuilt due to administrative obstacles created by local security officials. Other examples reported in the press during the period covered by this report include a Baptist church in Awlad Ilyas, near the southern city of Assiyut, which received a written approval for repairs in June 1999, but on which local police prevented work from being performed, and a bishop's residence in Manfalout, near Assiyut, which received a permit for a new building in 2000 but on which local police stopped work in 2001.

As a result of these restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. On December 16, 2001, the mayor of the new community of al'Obour (north of Cairo) ordered the demolition of a fence surrounding a plot of land designated for construction of a church. The local congregation had erected the fence without a permit and had begun holding prayer services on the site while they awaited a presidential decree. In addition the congregation of the Baptist church in Awlad Ilyas, near Assiyut, has used the churchyard for prayers because local police have prevented repairs to the structure.

In January 1996, human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed suit challenging the constitutionality of a 1934 Minister of Interior decree, which was based on an 1856 Ottoman decree governing the building of places of worship for non-Muslims. In December 1998, an administrative court referred Naklah's case to the State Commissioner's Office, which in September 2000, recommended rejecting the suit on the grounds that Naklah had no standing to file suit. In October 2000, upon receiving a rebuttal from Naklah, the court returned the case to the State Commissioner's Office, and requested an opinion on the constitutionality of the 10 conditions. The State Commissioner's Office had not issued an opinion on this matter by the end of the period covered by this report, and it appears unlikely that the case will be heard.

In 1960, President Gamal Abdel Nasser issued a decree (Law 263 for 1960) banning Baha'i institutions and community activities. All Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries, were confiscated. This ban has not been rescinded.

Political parties based on religion are illegal. Pursuant to this law, the Muslim Brotherhood is an illegal organization. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views, although they do not explicitly identify themselves as members of the organization, and they remain subject to government pressure. Seventeen independent candidates backed by the Muslim Brotherhood were elected to the People's Assembly in the November 2000 parliamentary elections.

Unlike in previous years, there were no new cases of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical. On July 30, 2001, the Cairo Personal Status Court rejected a lawsuit against feminist author Nawal al-Sa'adawi, in which Islamist attorney Nabih al-Wahsh sought to force the divorce of al-Sa'adawi from her husband on the grounds of apostasy due to views expressed by al-Sa'adawi regarding Muslim customs and beliefs. In June 2001, the Public Prosecutor ordered the release, pending an appeal, of author Ala'a Hamed, who had been convicted in 1998 of insulting Islam in a novel; the Court still had not heard his appeal by the end of June 2002.

Various ministries legally are authorized to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Islamic Research Center at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor, but not to confiscate, all publications dealing with the Koran and Islamic scriptural texts. In recent years, the Center has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, but there were no new cases during the year.

In 1995 an administrative court ruled that the sole authority to prohibit publication or distribution of books and other works of art is vested in the Ministry of Culture. This decision invalidated a 1994 advisory opinion by a judiciary council that had expanded Al-Azhar's censorship authority to include visual and audio artistic works. The same year, President Mubarak stated that the Government would not allow confiscation of books from the market without a court order, a position supported by the then-Mufti of the Republic, who is now the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

In 1997 human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed suit seeking removal of the religious affiliation category from government identification cards. Naklah challenged the constitutionality of a 1994 decree by the Minister of Interior governing

the issuance of new identification cards. The court repeatedly has delayed setting a trial date, and it appears unlikely that the case will be heard.

The Constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination due to religion or creed, and in general, the Government upholds these constitutional protections; however, government discrimination against non-Muslims exists. There are no Christians serving as governors, presidents of public universities, or deans. There are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Although there was improvement in a few areas, government discriminatory practices include: discrimination against Christians in the public sector; discrimination against Christians in staff appointments to public universities; payment of Muslim imams through public funds (Christian clergy are paid by private church funds); and refusal to admit Christians to Al-Azhar University (which is publicly funded). In general public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers refuse to admit non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Koran; however, in 2001 the first Christian graduated from an Arabic-language department at the Suez Canal University.

Anti-Semitic articles and editorials are published in privately owned papers and, to a lesser extent, in the Government press, and have increased since 2000 following the increase in violence in Israel and in the occupied territories. The Government reportedly has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitism. However, government officials insist that manifestations of anti-Semitism in the media are a direct result of Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism.

On September 6, 2001, an administrative court in Alexandria ruled in favor of a suit brought by a local resident calling for cancellation of an annual Jewish celebration at the tomb of Rabbi Abu Hasira in the Delta on the grounds of indecency, as well as suspension of a Ministry of Culture decree declaring the tomb an antiquity site protected by the Government. The Ministry of Culture contested the Alexandria court's decision; the case was pending before a higher administrative court at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 1996 upon agreement with Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda, the Minister of Awqaf, Hamdy Zaqzouq, established a joint committee to address a dispute with the Coptic Orthodox Church that originated in 1952. At that time, the Government seized approximately 1,500 acres of agricultural land from the Church and transferred title to the Ministry of Awqaf, which is responsible for administering religious trusts. Based on the committee's recommendations, more than 800 acres have been returned to the Church during the last few years. In August 2000, the Coptic Orthodox Church won a lawsuit to reclaim several plots of land in greater Cairo that had been seized by private or Government institutions before 1952; however, there continued to be no new returns during the year.

According to a 1995 law, the application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual's religion. In the practice of family law, the State recognizes only the three "heavenly religions": Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to the Personal Status Law, which draws on Shari'a (Islamic law). Christian families are subject to canon law, and Jewish families are subject to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply the Personal Status Law.

Under Shari'a non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on Shari'a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, while Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half her parents' estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits all his parents' property. Male Muslim heirs face strong social pressure to provide for all family members who require assistance; however, this assistance is not always provided. In January 2000, the Parliament passed a new Personal Status Law that made it easier for a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego alimony and the return of her dowry.

The Coptic Orthodox Church excommunicates women members who marry Muslim men, and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy in order to marry a member of the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in specific circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs, and whose activities are believed to jeopardize communal harmony. For example, in January 2001, the Government arrested 18 persons in the southern Egyptian city of Sohag—most were Baha'is and some were Muslims—on suspicion of violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code (“insulting a heavenly religion”) and other possible charges. The detainees were released without charge in small groups during September and October 2001.

On July 18, 2001, a State Security Emergency Court began the trial of a group of 52 men arrested in Cairo in May 2001 on suspicion of homosexual activity and unorthodox religious practices. Two of the defendants, who allegedly advocated a belief system combining Islam and tolerance for homosexuality, were charged with violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code. Their trial was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The remaining 50 detainees faced charges unrelated to religious beliefs or practices. On November 14, 2001, the two were convicted and given sentences of 5 and 3 years in prison respectively. Twenty others received 2-year sentences and one received a 1-year sentence for “habitual debauchery,” while 29 were acquitted. In May 2002, President Mubarak ratified the verdicts against the two convicted of violating Article 98(F), but overturned the conviction of the other 21, ordering their retrial in a regular criminal court instead of a State Security Emergency Court. The retrial had not yet begun by the end of the period covered by this report.

On December 24, 2001, Scientologists Wafaa Ahmed (holding a Jordanian passport) and Mahmoud Masarwa (holding an Israeli passport) were detained on suspicion of violating Article 98(F) due to their promotion of the book “Dianetics.” On March 27, 2002, a State Security court in Cairo ordered their release pending trial on a bail of \$2,700 (10,000 Egyptian pounds). Ahmed and Masarwa, who held residency and work permits in Italy, were deported to Italy on April 11, 2002.

On March 5, 2002, a State Security Emergency Court convicted eight persons from the city of Mataria near Cairo of violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code. They were arrested in October 2001 for holding unorthodox Islamic beliefs and practices. Sentences ranged from 3 years in prison for the two principal defendants to 1-year suspended sentences for the remaining 6 persons, who were dealt with more leniently because they were not accused of propagating the unorthodox beliefs.

On May 29, 2002, a State Security Emergency Court in Nasr City (in greater Cairo) began hearing the case of 21 persons accused of “insulting religion due to unorthodox Islamic beliefs and practices.” The trial was ongoing, and 17 of the defendants remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, while 4 were released.

In August 1999, the public prosecutor reopened and expanded an investigation of police torture of mostly Christian detainees that took place during the police investigation in August and September 1998 of the murder of Samir Aweda Hakim and Karam Tamer Aarsal in the largely Coptic village of Al-Kush in Sohag governorate. However, the investigation made little progress since 2001 and appeared effectively closed. It is unclear whether religion was a factor in the 1998 actions of the police officers. Police abuse of detainees is a widespread practice that occurs regardless of a detainee's religious beliefs.

On June 5, 2000, a criminal court in Sohag city convicted Shayboub William Aarsal of the 1998 murder of Hakim and Aarsal. The court sentenced Shayboub to 15 years' hard labor. An appeal that has been pending for 2 years had not been heard by the end of the period covered by this report. The Christian community of Al-Kush believes that Shayboub, a Christian resident of Al-Kush, was accused and convicted of the crime because of his religion.

In June 2001, the Public Prosecutor ordered the release, pending an appeal, of author Ala'a Hamed, who had been convicted of insulting Islam in a novel in 1998; his appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by the report.

Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibit proselytizing, but those accused of proselytizing have been harassed by police or arrested on charges of violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which prohibits citizens from ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

While there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there are occasional reports that police harass Christians who had converted from Islam. In cases involving conversion from Islam to Christianity, authorities in the past also have charged several converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents. In such instances, converts, who fear government harassment if they officially register the change from Islam to Christianity, have altered their identification cards and other official documents themselves to reflect their new reli-

gious affiliation. However, there were no reports of such charges during the period covered by this report.

An estimated several thousand persons are imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government states that these persons are in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. During the period covered by this report, security forces arrested several hundred persons allegedly associated with the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Most observers believe that the Government was seeking to undermine Muslim Brotherhood organization of pro-Palestinian and anti-U.S. and anti-Israel demonstrations. There also were arrests of Muslim Brotherhood supporters following a People's Assembly byelection in Alexandria in June 2002. President Mubarak referred three alleged extremist groups to trial before military tribunals.

In past years, Coptic Christians have been the objects of occasional violent assaults by the Islamic Group and other terrorists. However, there have been no reports of terrorist attacks against Christians since 1998.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government. There were reports of forced conversions of Coptic girls to Islam by Muslim men. Reports of such cases are disputed and often include inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnaping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involve a Coptic girl who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim boy. According to the Government, in such cases the girl must meet with her family, with her priest, and with the head of her church before she is allowed to convert. However, there are credible reports of Government harassment of or lack of cooperation with Christian families that attempt to regain custody of their daughters, and of the failure of the authorities to uphold the law (which states that a marriage of a girl under the age of 16 is prohibited, and between the ages of 16 and 21 is illegal, without the approval and presence of her guardian) in cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim boy.

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, the Government took several steps to promote and improve religious freedom and tolerance. Following terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001, and the increase in Israeli-Palestinian violence, government religious institutions such as Al-Azhar accelerated a schedule of interfaith discussions inside the country and abroad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda participated in many joint public events, such as an October 11, 2001, conference entitled "World Developments and Implications for National Unity" and the May 2002 14th General Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. Sheikh Tantawi also participated in a January 2002 meeting organized by the Anglican Church in Alexandria of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders from Egypt, Israel, and areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. At the end of the conference, President Mubarak received the group, which issued a joint statement on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In May 2002, during a visit to the southern city of Sohag to inaugurate Islamic projects, Sheikh Tantawi visited the Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Sohag and gave a speech on the strong bond between Christians and Muslims.

In an unusual gesture, in July 2001, the graduating class of the Air Defense Academy held a parade reviewed by President Mubarak, during which officers marched in the formation of an Islamic crescent embracing a cross.

During the period covered by this report, the Government took more prompt action than it had in the past to contain incidents of sectarian tension. In response to demonstrations by Christians in June 2001 following the publication of a newspaper story and photos regarding a defrocked Coptic monk, President Mubarak held a lengthy meeting with Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda on July 8, 2001, and the Government prosecuted the newspaper's publisher for slander (see Section III). When Muslim villagers burned a newly rebuilt church in Bani Walimss in the southern Egyptian province of Minya on February 10, 2002, the Governor of Minya went the same day to the church, met with the local bishop, and made a public statement denouncing the violence. The Government ordered the church to be rebuilt at Government expense, and it was reconsecrated in the presence of the Governor and Muslim clerics on April 27, 2002. In a number of cases reported in the

media, Government officials participated in the consecration ceremonies for new churches. For example, on March 21, 2002, Pope Shenouda laid the cornerstone for the first Coptic Orthodox church in South Sinai province in the presence of Government officials, sheikhs from Al-Azhar, and a representative of the Holy See.

On March 4, 2002, the Basatin cemetery bridge, a joint project of the Government and the American NGO Athra Kadisha, was completed. The project, on which negotiations began in 1989, is a modern highway—part of Cairo's Ring Road—that traverses a cemetery but respects Jewish religious strictures against moving or disturbing burial sites.

Building on actions first taken in late 1999, government-owned television and radio continued to expand the amount of programming time devoted to Christian issues, including live broadcast of Christmas and Easter services, excerpts from Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda's weekly public addresses, documentaries on the country's monasteries, the travels of the Holy Family and other aspects of Christian history, and discussions among Muslims and Christians of local and international topics including discrimination. Christian clergy spoke on popular television programs such as "Good Morning Egypt" about current topics and Christian religious beliefs. A version of Sesame Street especially designed for the country by the Children's Television Workshop with assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that began in August 2000, gained broad viewership among young children and many of their parents. Among the aims of the program is the promotion of tolerance, and one of the principal characters is a Christian. There were no discriminatory programs in the broadcast media.

Government and independent newspapers published a broad spectrum of news and views on religious topics, particularly following the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001. The Government-run printing house Dar al-Ma'arif published for sale a new edition of the four Christian gospels, resuming a practice that had stopped decades ago.

The Minister of Education has developed and distributed curricular materials instructing teachers in government schools to discuss and promote tolerance in teaching. Government schools began using a new curriculum on the Coptic and Byzantine periods of Egyptian history, developed with the advice and support of Christian intellectuals and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Muslims and Christians share a common history and national identity. They also share the same ethnicity, race, culture, and language. Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, and Christians and Muslims live as neighbors. At times religious tensions flare up, and individual acts of prejudice occur. Members of both faiths practice discrimination. The majority of citizens agree that more needs to be done to eliminate discrimination, but argue that development of the economy, polity, and society is the most effective and enduring way to abolish social prejudice.

On February 10, 2002, Muslim villagers firebombed a newly reconstructed church in Bani Walimss, in the southern province of Minya, during the consecration ceremony, allegedly in reaction to prolonged tolling of the church bells. Local police intervened and halted the violence, during which several people were injured and property damaged; 49 persons were arrested. The Governor of Minya went to the church on the same day, made a public statement denouncing the violence, and met with the local bishop the same day, and the Government ordered that the damaged church and private properties be repaired at government expense. In March local government officials, parliamentarians, and Muslim and Christian clerics brokered a reconciliation between the Christian and Muslim families. Victims of the violence agreed not to press charges, and the 49 persons detained were released. On April 27, 2002, the repaired church was reconsecrated in the presence of the Governor and local Christian and Muslim clergy.

On July 26, 2000, gunmen killed Christian farmer Magdy Ayyad Mus'ad and wounded five other persons in Giza province, allegedly because of objections to a church Mus'ad built. Authorities charged a person with the killing but released the suspect on bail in October 2000; by the end of the period covered by this report, no trial date had been set. On December 11, 2000, Father Hezkiyal Ghebriyal, a 75-year-old Coptic Orthodox priest, was stabbed and seriously wounded in the village of Bardis, near Sohag. Police arrested the suspected attacker. At the end of the period covered by this report, the suspect remained in prison pending an ongoing investigation. The case of Ahmad and Ibrahim Nasir, who were sentenced to 7 years in prison for the September 1999 murder of a monk in Assiyut, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The Court of Cassation had not yet set a date to hear an appeal by the Public Prosecutor seeking a heavier sentence.

On June 23, 2002, a State Security Court in Assiyut began hearing the trial of Mohammed Abdel Azim, accused of participating in the killing of 13 Christians in the village of Sanbo in March 1992. Abdel Azim had been sentenced in absentia to 3 years in prison in 1994. He was extradited to Egypt by Saudi Arabia in late 2001.

A trade dispute between a Christian clothing merchant and a Muslim customer that occurred on December 31, 1999, in the village of Al-Kush in Sohag governorate, escalated into violent exchanges between Muslims and Christians in the area, and resulted in the death of 21 Christians and 1 Muslim by January 2, 2000. On February 5, 2001, the Sohag Criminal Court acquitted 92 of the 96 defendants (58 Muslims and 38 Christians) accused of the crimes committed in Al-Kush. One defendant was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years in prison and three defendants were convicted of arson and sentenced to 1 year in prison. Based on an appeal by the Public Prosecutor, on July 30, 2001, the Court of Cassation overturned the verdicts and ordered a retrial. The retrial began in November 2001 and was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

While there is no legal requirement for a Christian girl or woman to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim (see Section II), conversion to Islam is sometimes used to circumvent the legal prohibition on marriage between the ages of 16 and 21 without the approval and presence of the girl's guardian. Most Christian families would object to a daughter's wish to marry a Muslim, and if a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, the Church excommunicates her. According to the Government, a Christian family whose minor daughter converts to Islam retains guardianship over her, but in practice local authorities sometimes allow transfer to a Muslim custodian, who is likely to grant approval for an underage marriage. The law is silent on the matter of the acceptable age of conversion. Ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert (see Section II). Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

Official relations between Christian and Muslim religious figures are amicable, and include reciprocal visits to religious celebrations. Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf engage in frequent public and private interfaith discussions with Christians of various denominations, both within the country and in other countries. NGO's such as the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) are active in organizing formal and informal interfaith events; CEOSS held such events in September 2001, February 2002, and May 2002 with the participation of Al-Azhar, the Ministry of Awqaf, and Christian clerics. Private Christian schools admit Muslim students, and religious charities serve both communities.

Anti-Semitic articles and editorials are published in privately owned newspapers and less frequently in the government press, and have increased since the increase of violence in Israel and the occupied territories in late 2000 (see Section II). However, there were no anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report directed at the tiny Jewish community.

On June 17, 2001, Al-Naba' newspaper published an article involving alleged sexual misconduct in a Coptic Orthodox monastery. The article provoked unusual demonstrations by Coptic Christians in Cairo from June 17 to 20, during which demonstrators criticized both the Government and the church leadership for treatment of a number of issues, including discrimination against Christians and the Al-Kush trial. One demonstration at the Coptic Orthodox Church headquarters turned violent, and several demonstrators and police officers were hospitalized with minor injuries. Police detained 22 demonstrators on suspicion of illegal public assembly and damaging public property. All demonstrators were released on bail within a few weeks and none had been prosecuted by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Coptic Orthodox Church and the Government reacted strongly to the story in Al-Naba'. The Coptic Orthodox Church promptly announced that the monk in question had been defrocked 5 years earlier and sued for slander Mamdouh Mahran, publisher and editor-in-chief of al-Naba'. On September 16, 2001, a State Security Emergency Court convicted Mahran of slander and violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code ("insulting a heavenly religion") and sentenced him to 3 years in prison. In July 2001, the State Council Administrative Court revoked publishing licenses for Al-Naba' and its sister publication Akher Khabar, but in May 2002 a higher Administrative Court overturned the ruling and the newspapers resumed publication.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The subject of religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialog. The subject has been raised at all levels of government, including by the President, Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the U.S. Ambassador, and other embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office

of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition the Ambassador has discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom issues regularly in contacts with other government officials, including governors and Members of Parliament. The Ambassador also has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among Egyptians of all faiths. Visiting congressional delegations have raised religious freedom issues during visits with government officials.

The U.S. Embassy maintains an active dialog with the leaders of the Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigates every complaint of religious discrimination brought to its attention. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom with a range of contacts, including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside of the capital area. Mission officials actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through immediate contacts with editors-in-chief.

The U.S. Mission, including the Department of State and USAID, works to expand human rights and to ameliorate the conditions that contribute to religious strife by promoting economic, social, and political development. U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom.

The Mission is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promote religious tolerance. In April 2000, USAID funded the Nongovernmental Organization Service Center to provide training, technical assistance, and grants to domestic NGO's. By the end of the period covered by this report, a total of 123 NGO's had received financial assistance from the Center, totaling in value more than \$2 million. In addition the Center has provided training for over 4,300 NGO representatives in the areas of advocacy, internal governance, networking, social development, and management. USAID supports a major effort to improve the administration of justice, and State Department exchange activities promote legal reform and access to justice. The Embassy has nominated participants interested in advocacy for the State Department's International Visitor Program and invited American specialists in this subject to speak in the country.

The U.S. Mission also promotes civic education. The public affairs section of the Embassy supports the development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums. USAID, in collaboration with the Children's Television Workshop, developed an Egyptian version of the television program Sesame Street, which is designed to reach remote households and has as one of its goals the promotion of tolerance, including among different religions. The program began broadcasting in August 2000; in 2002 household survey data showed that it was reaching more than 90 percent of elementary school-aged children (see Section II). USAID also supports private voluntary organizations that are implementing innovative curriculums in private schools. The public affairs section of the Embassy is leading an effort to increase the professionalism of the press, with an emphasis on balanced and responsible coverage. Finally USAID is working with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

IRAN¹

The Constitution declares that the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of "Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of the country's religious minorities—including Baha'is, Jews, Christians, and Sufi Muslims—reported imprisonment, harassment, and intimidation based on their religious beliefs. At least four Baha'is were among those still imprisoned for reasons related to their faith, while eight Jews remained in prison after being convicted in 2000 for cooperating with a hostile government, belonging to an illegal organization, and recruiting members in an illegal organization.

¹The United States does not have an embassy in Iran. This report draws heavily on non-U.S. Government sources.

Society is accustomed to the presence of non-Muslim communities, some of which predate Islam. However, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities, especially Baha'is, Jews, and evangelical Christians.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government's treatment of religious minorities in public statements, support for relevant U.N. and non-governmental organization (NGO) efforts, and diplomatic contacts with other countries.

In October 2001, the Secretary of State designated Iran as a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act, for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. This action followed similar designations in September 1999 and September 2000.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 631,663 square miles, and its population is approximately 66 million. The population is approximately 99 percent Muslim, of which 89 percent are Shi'a and 10 percent Sunni (mostly Turkomen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest). Sufi Brotherhoods are popular, but there are no reliable figures available regarding the size of the Sufi population.

Baha'is, Christians, Zoroastrians, Mandaeans, and Jews constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha'i community, which has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 20,000 to 30,000. These figures represent a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Government estimates the Christian community to number approximately 115,000 to 120,000 persons; however, the U.N. Special Representative (UNSR) used the figure of 300,000 in a 2001 report. The majority of the Christian population are ethnic Armenians and Assyro-Chaldeans. There also are Protestant denominations, including evangelical churches. The UNSR reported that Christians are emigrating at an estimated rate of 15,000 to 20,000 per year. The Mandaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, number approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest.

The Government figures reported by the United Nations in 1996 place the size of the Zoroastrian community at approximately 35,000 adherents. Zoroastrian groups cite a larger figure of approximately 60,000, according to the same U.N. report. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians and are concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and thus played a central role in the country's history.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares that the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." It also states that "other Islamic denominations are to be accorded full respect," and designates Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians as the only "recognized religious minorities," which, "within the limits of the law," are permitted to perform their religious rites and ceremonies and "to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education." Although the Constitution states that "the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden" and that "no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief," the adherents of religions not specifically protected under the Constitution do not enjoy freedom of activity. This situation most directly affects adherents of the Baha'i Faith. The Government regards the Baha'i community, whose faith originally derives from a strand of Islam, as a misguided or wayward "sect." The Government fuels anti-Baha'i and anti-Jewish sentiment in the country for political purposes. Government officials have stated that the Baha'is "are not a religious minority, but a political organization which was associated with the Shah's regime, is against the Iranian Revolution and engages in espionage activities." However, government officials reportedly nonetheless have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under other articles of the Constitution as citizens.

The central feature of the country's Islamic republican system is rule by a "religious jurisconsult." The Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic controls the most important levers of power; he is chosen by a group of 83 religious scholars. All acts of the Majles (legislative body) must be reviewed for conformity with Islamic law and principles by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics ap-

pointed by the Supreme Leader and six Muslim jurists (legal scholars) nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and elected by parliament.

Religious activity is monitored closely by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and by the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). Adherents of recognized religious minorities are not required to register individually with the Government; however, their community, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Bahai's is a police function. Evangelical Christian groups have been pressured by government authorities to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals have resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops are required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

In a March 2002 meeting at the Vatican with Pope John Paul II, Speaker of the Majles Mahdi Karrubi called for the expansion of Tehran-Vatican ties and said that dialog among religions can promote the restoration of peace and the elimination of violence in the world. In June 2002, Mohammad Khamenei, brother of the Supreme Leader, told the Pope in a Vatican meeting that dialog among religions was an ideal means for establishing global peace and justice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious minorities, by law and practice, are barred from being elected to a representative body (except to the seats in the Majles reserved for minorities, as provided for in the Constitution) and from holding senior government or military positions. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote, but they may not run for President. All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

Members of religious minorities are barred from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to Islam. The law stipulates penalties for government workers who do not observe "Islam's principles and rules." Religious minorities may not serve in the judiciary or the security services. The Constitution states that "the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be an Islamic army, i.e., committed to an Islamic ideology and the people, and must recruit into its service individuals who have faith in the objectives of the Islamic Revolution and are devoted to the cause of achieving its goals." Bahai's are prohibited from government employment.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology, which limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education, although all public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. Applicants for public sector employment similarly are screened for their knowledge of Islam.

The Government generally allows recognized religious minorities to conduct the religious education of their adherents. This includes separate and privately funded Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian schools but does not include Baha'i schools. The Ministry of Education, which imposes certain curriculum requirements, supervises these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools is not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. All textbooks used in course work, including religious texts, must be approved for use by the Ministry of Education. Religious texts in non-Persian languages require approval by the authorities for use. This requirement imposes sometimes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

Recognized religious minorities may provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages but often come under pressure from the authorities when conducting such instruction in Persian. In particular evangelical Christian and Jewish communities suffer harassment and arrest by authorities for the printing of materials or delivery of sermons in Persian.

Recognized religious minorities are allowed by the Government to establish community centers and certain cultural, social, sports, or charitable associations that they finance themselves. This does not apply to the Baha'i community, which since 1983 has been denied the right to assemble officially or to maintain administrative institutions. Because the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatens its existence in the country.

Religious minorities suffer discrimination in the legal system, receiving lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits, and incurring heavier punishments. Muslim men are free to marry non-Muslim women but marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not recognized.

The Government is highly suspicious of any proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims and can be harsh in its response, in particular against Bahai's and evangelical Christians.

The Government does not ensure the right of citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, can be punishable by death.

The Baha'i Faith originated in Iran during the 1840's as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. Initially it attracted a wide following among Shi'a clergy. The political and religious authorities of that time joined to suppress the movement, and since then the hostility of the Shi'a clergy to the Baha'i Faith has remained strong. Baha'is are considered apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Mohammed. The Baha'i Faith is defined by the Government as a political "sect," historically linked to the Pahlavi regime and, hence, counterrevolutionary. Historically at risk in the country, Baha'is often have suffered increased levels of harassment and abuse during times of political unrest.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with coreligionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel, exposes Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in particular when caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is appear to be aimed at destroying them as a community. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith. Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 revolution. None of the properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed.

Baha'is are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. They are permitted access only to areas of wasteland that the Government designates for their use, and are not allowed to mark the graves. Many historic Baha'i gravesites have been desecrated or destroyed. In 2000 in the city of Abadeh, a Revolutionary Guard officer bulldozed a Baha'i cemetery with 22 graves.

In what appeared to be a hopeful development, in 2002 the Government offered the Tehran community a piece of land for use as a cemetery. However, the land was in the desert, with no access to water, making it impossible to perform Baha'i mourning rituals. In addition the Government stipulated that no markers be put on individual graves and that no mortuary facilities be built on the site, making it impossible to perform a proper burial.

Baha'i group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students, a particularly demoralizing blow to a community that traditionally has placed a high value on education. Denial of access to higher education appears aimed at the eventual impoverishment of the Baha'i community.

Baha'is regularly are denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization. Government authorities claim that only Muslim plaintiffs are eligible for compensation in these circumstances.

A 1993 law prohibits government workers from membership in groups that deny the "divine religions," terminology that the Government uses to label members of the Baha'i Faith. The law also stipulates penalties for government workers who do not observe "Islamic principles and rules."

In 1993 the UNSR reported the existence of a government policy directive regarding the Baha'is. According to the directive, the Supreme Revolutionary Council instructed government agencies to block the progress and development of the Baha'i community, expel Baha'i students from universities, cut Baha'i links with groups outside the country, restrict employment of Baha'is, and deny Baha'is "positions of influence," including in education. The Government claims that the directive is a forgery. However, it appears to be an accurate reflection of current government practice designed to eradicate slowly the Baha'i community.

In September 2001, the Ministry of Justice issued a report that reiterated that government policy continued to aim at the eventual elimination of the Baha'is as a community. It stated in part that Baha'is would only be permitted to enroll in schools if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools that have a strong and imposing religious ideology. The report also stated that Baha'is must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is.

While in recent years the Government has eased some restrictions, thereby enabling Baha'is to obtain food-ration booklets and send their children to public elementary and secondary schools, the prohibition against the admission of Baha'is to universities remains. Thousands of Baha'is dismissed from government jobs in the early 1980's receive no unemployment benefits and have been required to repay the Gov-

ernment for salaries or pensions received from the first day of employment. Those unable to do so face prison sentences.

Over the past several years, the Government has taken some positive steps in recognizing the rights of Baha'is, as well as other religious minorities. In November 1999, President Khatami publicly stated that no one in the country should be persecuted because of his or her religious beliefs. He added that he would defend the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs or religion. Subsequently the Expediency Council approved the "Right of Citizenship" bill, affirming the social and political rights of all citizens and their equality before the law. In February 2000, following approval of the bill, the head of the judiciary issued a circular letter to all registry offices throughout the country that provided for any couple to be registered as husband and wife without being required to state their religious affiliation. The measure effectively permits the registration of Baha'i marriages in the country. Previously Baha'i marriages were not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Thus children of Baha'i marriages were not recognized as legitimate and therefore denied inheritance rights.

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslim elements that Jewish citizens support Zionism and the State of Israel, create a threatening atmosphere for the small Jewish community. Jewish leaders reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

In principle with some exceptions, there appears to be little restriction or interference with the religious practice of Judaism. However, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allows the teaching of Hebrew, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages teachers from distributing Hebrew texts to students, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government has required that several Jewish schools remain open on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Because working or attending school on the Sabbath violates Jewish religious law, this requirement has made it difficult for observant Jews to both attend school and adhere to important tenets of their religion.

Jews are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but often are denied the multiple-exit permits that normally are issued to citizens. With the exception of certain business travelers, Jews are required by the authorities to obtain clearance (and pay additional fees) before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jews and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time. Jews were removed progressively from government positions after the 1979 revolution.

According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees Background Paper on Iran, the Mandaean are regarded as Christians, and are included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaeans regard themselves not as Christians, but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then has been the subject of debate in the Majles and never has been clarified. The small community faces discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities.

Although Sunni Muslims are accorded full respect under the terms of the Constitution, some groups claim to be discriminated against by the Government. In particular Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, and claim that authorities refuse to authorize construction of a Sunni place of worship in the capital. Sunnis also have accused the state broadcasting company of airing programming insulting to Sunnis.

Sufi organizations outside the country remain concerned about repression by the authorities of Sufi religious practices.

Shortly after the 1979 revolution, the Government repealed the Family Protection Law, a hallmark bill that was adopted in 1967, providing women with increased rights in the home and workplace, and replaced it with a legal system based largely on Shari'a (Islamic law). The Government enforces gender segregation in most public spaces, and prohibits women from interacting openly with unmarried men or men not related to them. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances. Women are prohibited from attending male sporting events, although this restriction does not appear to be enforced universally. While the enforcement of conservative Islamic dress codes has varied with the political climate since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, what women wear in public is not entirely a matter

of personal choice. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate and may be sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. The law prohibits the publication of pictures of uncovered women in the print media, including pictures of foreign women. There are penalties for failure to observe Islamic dress codes at work.

In 1998 the Majles passed legislation that mandated segregation of the sexes in the provision of medical care. The bill provided for women to be treated only by female physicians and men by male physicians, which raised questions about the quality of care that women could receive under such a regime, considering the current imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists.

Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men. The testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man in court. A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before traveling outside the country.

In October 2000, the Majles passed a bill to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 9 to 15. However, in November 2000, the Council of Guardians rejected the bill as contrary to Islamic law, although even under the current law, marriage at the minimum age is rare. All women, no matter the age, must have the permission of their father or a living male relative in order to marry. The law allows for the practice of *Siqeh*, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl may become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The *Siqeh* marriage may last for a night or as little as 30 minutes. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and, according to Islamic law, men may have as many *Siqeh* wives as they wish. Such wives are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

Under legislation passed in 1983, women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. In 1998 the Majles passed a law that granted custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child. The measure was enacted because of the complaints of mothers who had lost custody of their children to former husbands with drug addictions and criminal records.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed and 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs.

The Government appears to adhere to a practice of keeping a small number of Baha'is in arbitrary detention, some at risk of execution, at any given time. There were four Baha'is reported to be in prison for practicing their faith at the end of the period covered by this report, two facing life sentences and two facing sentences of 15 years. In addition the Government appears to engage in harassment of the Baha'i community by arresting Baha'is arbitrarily, charging them, and then releasing them, often without dropping the charges against them. Those with charges still pending against them fear arrest at any time.

Two Baha'is, Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, were tried in 1998 and later sentenced to death by a revolutionary court in Mashad for practicing their faith. In 2000 the sentences were reduced to 7 and 5 years respectively. Kashefi-Najafabadi was released in October 2001, after serving 4 years of his sentence. Zabihi-Moghaddam, who originally was arrested in November 1997, was released in June 2002.

The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs. Manuchehr Khulusi was arrested in June 1999 while visiting fellow Baha'is in the town of Birjand, and was imprisoned until his release in May 2000. During his imprisonment, Khulusi was interrogated, beaten, held in solitary confinement, and denied access to his lawyer. The charges brought against him remain unknown, but they were believed to be related to his faith. The Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mashhad held a 2-day trial in September 1999 and sentenced Khulusi to death in February 2000. Despite Khulusi's release, it is unclear if the conviction and death sentence against him still stand.

The property rights of Baha'is generally are disregarded. Since 1979 large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is have been confiscated. During the period covered by this report, 14 Baha'i homes were seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Authorities reportedly confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata and forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands. Authorities also imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In 2000 authorities in Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz reportedly also confiscated eight buildings belonging to Baha'is. In one instance, a woman from Isfahan who legally traveled abroad found that her home had been confiscated when she returned home. During the period covered by the report, the Government also seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents. In 1999 three Baha'i homes in Yazd and one in Arbakan were confiscated because their owners were Baha'is. The Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property, as well as its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment, are eroding the economic base of the Baha'i community.

In 1998 after a nationwide raid of more than 500 Baha'i homes and offices, as well as numerous arrests, the authorities closed the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning. Also known as the "Open University," the Institute was established by the Baha'i community shortly after the revolution to offer higher educational opportunities to Baha'i students who had been denied access to the country's high schools and universities. The Institute remains closed.

It has become somewhat easier for Baha'is to obtain passports in order to travel abroad. In addition some Iranian embassies abroad do not require applicants to state a religious affiliation. In such cases, it is easier for Baha'is to renew passports. Nevertheless, in February 2001, the Government denied visas to foreigners in the Baha'i delegation to the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Racism, held in Tehran. The delegation was composed of American, Japanese, South Korean, and Indian nationals.

The authorities particularly are vigilant in curbing what is perceived as proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians whose services are conducted in Persian. Government officials have reacted to such activity by closing evangelical churches and arresting converts. Members of evangelical congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshipers are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. Meetings for evangelical services have been restricted by the authorities to Sundays, and church officials have been ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Because conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under Shari'as enforced in the country, non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they would not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

Mistreatment of evangelical Christians continued during the period covered by this report. Christian groups have reported instances of government harassment of churchgoers in Tehran, in particular against worshipers at the Assembly of God congregation in the capital. Instances of harassment cited included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises, and demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshipers inside.

Some Jewish groups outside the country cite an increase in anti-Semitic propaganda in the official and semiofficial media as adding to the pressure felt by the Jewish community. One example cited is the periodic publication of the anti-Semitic and fictitious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," both by the Government and by periodicals associated with hardline elements of the regime. In 1986 the Iranian Embassy in London was reported to have published and distributed the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in English. The Protocols also were published in serial form in the country in 1994 and again in January 1999. On the latter occasion, they were published in *Sobh*, a conservative monthly publication reportedly aligned with the security services.

In February and March 1999, 13 Jews were arrested in the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan. Among the group were several prominent rabbis, teachers of Hebrew, and their students. The charges centered on alleged acts of espionage on behalf of Israel, an offense punishable by death. The 13 were detained for over a year before trial, largely in solitary confinement, without official charges or access to lawyers. In April 2000, the defendants were appointed lawyers, and a closed trial commenced in a revolutionary court in Shiraz. Human rights groups and governments around the world criticized the lack of due process in the proceedings. The UNSR characterized the proceedings as "in no way fair." On July 1, 2000, 10 of the 13, along with

2 Muslim defendants, were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. They received prison sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. Three were acquitted. The lawyers of those convicted filed an appeal and on September 21, 2000, an appeals court overturned the convictions for forming an illegal organization and recruiting agents, but upheld the convictions for illegal contacts with Israel. Their sentences were reduced to between 2 and 9 years' imprisonment. One of the 10 convicted was released in February 2001 upon completion of his prison term. A second was released at the end of his prison term in January 2002.

Jewish groups outside the country noted that the March 1999 arrest of the 13 Jewish individuals coincided with an increase in anti-Semitic propaganda in newspapers and journals associated with hardline elements of the Government. Since the beginning of the trial, Jewish businesses in Tehran and Shiraz have been targets of vandalism and boycotts, and Jews reportedly have suffered personal harassment and intimidation.

In 2002 the group Families of Iranian Jewish Prisoners (FIJP) published the names of 12 Iranian Jews who disappeared while attempting to escape from Iran in the 1990's. Babak Shaoulia Tehrani (born in 1977) and Shaheen Nikkhoo (1974) disappeared on June 8, 1994; Behzad (Kamran) Salari (1973) and Farhad Ezzati (1972) on September 21, 1994; Homayoun Balazadeh (1958), Omid Solouki (1979), Reuben Cohan-Masliah (1977), and Ibrahim Cohan-Masliah (1978) on December 8, 1994; Syrus Gaharamany (1939), Ibrahim Gaharamany (1937), Norallah Rbizadeh (Felfeli) (1952) on February 12, 1997; and Es-haagh Hassid (Hashid) (1933) on February 15, 1997. Hassid was last seen in Khorramabad Province. The other 11 all disappeared in Baluchistan Province. Their families have had no contact with them since the dates of their disappearance, but reported anecdotal evidence that some of them are alive and being held in prison. The Government never has provided any information regarding their whereabouts and has not charged any of them with crimes. FIJP believes that the Government has dealt with these cases differently than other such cases because the 12 persons involved are Jewish.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents.

There were no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the period covered by this report.

The Government restricts the movement of several senior religious leaders, some of whom have been under house arrest for years, and often charges members of religious minorities with crimes such as drug offenses, "confronting the regime," and apostasy.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, which was established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics, and which is overseen directly by the Supreme Leader, is not provided for in the Constitution, and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

During the latter part of 2000, a Special Clerical Court began the trial of Hojatolislam Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, a cleric who participated in a conference in Berlin on Iran, on charges of apostasy, "corruption on earth," "declaring war on God," and "denial of basic religious principles," which potentially carry the death penalty. Eshkevari has called for more liberal interpretations of Islamic law in certain areas. The verdict was not announced, but, according to Amnesty International, Eshkevari widely was reported to have been sentenced to death. In November 2001, following domestic and international criticism, his sentence reportedly was reduced to 30 months' imprisonment and removal of his status as a cleric. In November 1999, former Interior Minister and Vice President Abdollah Nouri was sentenced by a branch of the SCC to a 5-year prison term for allegedly publishing "anti-Islamic" articles, insulting government officials, promoting friendly relations with the United States, and providing illegal publicity to dissident cleric Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri in the pages of *Khordad*, a newspaper that was established by Nouri in late 1998 and closed at the time of his arrest. Nouri used the public trial to attack the legitimacy of the SCC.

In January 2001, judicial authorities closed *Kiyan*, a 10-year-old independent journal specializing in religious and philosophical issues. The Tehran General Court ordered the closure. The Judge stated that *Kiyan* had "published lies, disturbed public opinion and insulted sacred religion."

Laws based on religion were used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." In November 2000, a Revolutionary Court

began the trials of 17 writers, intellectuals, and political figures who took part in an April 2000 conference in Berlin regarding the implications of the February 2000 Majles elections. In January 2001, verdicts on charges including “insulting Islam” were announced after unfair and closed trials. At least eight of the defendants were sentenced to custodial sentences. Charges were reduced on appeal in December 2001. Some individuals were acquitted, some sentences were reduced, and other sentences were converted to fines.

Forced Religious Conversions

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. However, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The continuous activity of the country’s pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has accustomed the population to the presence of non-Muslims in society. However, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its prerevolutionary size. Some of this emigration is connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued perceived anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

The Government’s anti-Israel policies and the trial of the 13 Jews in 2000, along with the perception among some of the country’s radicalized elements that Iranian Jews support Zionism and the State of Israel, created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community (see Section II). Many Jews have sought to limit their contact with or support for the State of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Recent anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations have included the denunciation of “Jews,” as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only “Israel” and “Zionism,” adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local level, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran and thus cannot raise directly with the Government the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses that it commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic contacts with other countries.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government cosponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in Iran offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not sit on the Commission and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The United States has supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly. The U.S. Government has supported strongly the work of the UNSR on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Iranian Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research. (He has been denied entry visas since 1996.)

The U.S. State Department spokesman on numerous occasions has addressed the situation of the Baha’i and Jewish communities. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged those governments to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Iranian Government.

In October 2001, the Secretary of State again designated Iran as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Secretary of State similarly had designated Iran in September 1999 and in October 2000.

IRAQ

The Interim Constitution provides for individual freedom of religion, provided that it does not violate “morality and public order;” however, the Government severely

limits freedom of religion in practice, represses the Shi'a religious leadership, and seeks to exploit religious differences for political purposes. Islam is the official state religion. Other religions are practiced in the country, but the Government exercises repressive measures against any religious groups or organizations that are deemed not to provide full political and social support.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Although Shi'a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs traditionally have dominated economic and political life. Sunni Arabs are at a distinct advantage in all areas of secular life. The Government also severely restricts or bans outright many Shi'a religious practices. The Government for decades has conducted a brutal campaign of killings, summary execution, arbitrary arrest, and protracted detention against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and has sought to undermine the identity of minority Christian (Assyrian and Chaldean) and Yazidi groups. The regime systematically has killed senior Shi'a clerics, desecrated Shi'a mosques and holy sites, interfered with Shi'a religious education, and prevented Shi'a adherents from performing their religious rites.

Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, long have been disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially. Christians also report various abuses including repression of political rights.

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus is unable to raise directly with the Government the problems of severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights abuses. However, the U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and in diplomatic contacts with other states.

In 2001 the Secretary of State designated Iraq a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for its severe violations of religious freedom. Iraq was similarly designated in 1999 and 2000.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

While a precise statistical breakdown is impossible to ascertain because of likely inaccuracies in the latest census (conducted in 1997), according to best estimates, 97 percent of the population of 22 million persons are Muslim. Shi'a Muslims—predominantly Arab, but also including Turkomen, Faili Kurds, and other groups—constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population (approximately 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 15 percent Sunni Arabs, and the remainder Sunni Turkomen). The remaining approximately 3 percent of the overall population consist of Christians (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Roman Catholics, and Armenians), Yazidis, Mandaeans, and a small number of Jews.

Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south, also are a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the center of the country and in the north.

Shi'a and Sunni Arabs are not ethnically distinct. Shi'a Arabs have supported an independent Iraq alongside their Sunni brethren since the 1920 Revolt; many Shi'a joined the Ba'ath Party and Shi'a formed the backbone of the Iraqi Army in the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War.

Assyrians and Chaldeans are considered by many to be distinct ethnic groups, as well as the descendants of some of the earliest Christian communities. The communities speak a distinct language (Syriac). Although they do not define themselves as Arabs, the Government defines Assyrians and Chaldeans as such, evidently to encourage them to identify with the Sunni-Arab dominated regime. Christians are concentrated in the north and in Baghdad.

Yazidis are a syncretistic religious group (or a set of several groups). Many Yazidis consider themselves to be ethnically Kurdish, although some would define themselves as both religiously and ethnically distinct from Muslim Kurds. However, the Government, without any historical basis, has defined the Yazidis as Arabs. Yazidis predominately reside in the north of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Interim Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government severely restricts this right in practice. Islam is the official state religion. The Interim Constitution does not provide for the recognition of Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Yazidis.

The Government's registration requirements for religious organizations are unknown. New political parties must be based in Baghdad and are prohibited from having any ethnic or religious character. The Government does not recognize polit-

ical organizations that have been formed by Shi'a Muslims or Assyrian Christians. These groups continued to attract support despite their illegal status. There are religious qualifications for government office; candidates for the National Assembly, for example, "must believe in God."

There are no Shari'a (Islamic law) courts as such. Civil courts are empowered to administer Islamic law in cases involving personal status, such as divorce and inheritance.

In the north, an Islamic group called the Jund al-Islam seized control of several villages near Halabja during the period covered by this report, and established an administration governed under Shari'a. The group is alleged to have ties to the al-Qaida network and many from the group had spent time in Afghanistan while it was under the control of the Taliban. The group changed its name to Ansar al-Islam in December 2001. The group continued to control a small section of the northern part of the country along the Iranian border at the end of the period covered by this report. Local authorities claim that the group seeks to expand the area under its control by undermining the local administration, with the ultimate goal of imposing rule under Islamic law over all of the northern part of the country.

The group restricted non-Islamic worship, imposed severe restrictions on public behavior, and administered all civil affairs under an extreme interpretation of Islamic laws.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although Shi'a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs traditionally have dominated economic and political life. Sunni Arabs are at a distinct advantage in all areas of secular life, be it civil, political, military, or economic.

The following government restrictions on religious rights remained in effect throughout the period covered by this report: restrictions on communal Friday prayer by Shi'a; restrictions on Shi'a mosque libraries loaning books; a ban on the broadcast of Shi'a programs on government-controlled radio or television; a ban on the publication of Shi'a books, including prayer books and guides; a ban on many funeral processions other than those organized by the Government; a ban on other Shi'a funeral observances, such as gatherings for Koran reading; and the prohibition of certain processions and public meetings commemorating Shi'a holy days. The Government requires that speeches by Shi'a imams in mosques be based upon government-provided material that attacks fundamentalist trends.

Shi'a groups report capturing documents from the security services during the 1991 uprising that listed thousands of forbidden Shi'a religious writings. Since 1991 security forces have been encamped in the shrine to Imam Ali in Najaf, one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, and at the city's Shi'a theological schools. The shrine was closed for "repairs" for approximately 2 years after the 1991 uprising. The adjoining al-Khathra mosque, which was closed in 1994, has remained closed since. The closure coincided with the death of Ayatollah Sayed Mohammed Taqi al-Khoei, who was killed in what observers believe was a staged car accident; before his death, Ayatollah al-Khoei led prayers in the al-Khathra mosque.

In June 1999, several Shi'a opposition groups reported that the Government had instituted a program in the predominantly Shi'a districts of Baghdad that uses food ration cards to restrict where individuals may pray. The ration cards, part of the U.N. oil-for-food program, reportedly are checked when the bearer enters a mosque and are printed with a notice of severe penalties for those who attempt to pray at an unauthorized location. Shi'a expatriates who reported this policy believe that it is aimed not only at preventing unauthorized religious gatherings of Shi'a, but at stopping Shi'a adherents from attending Friday prayers in Sunni mosques, a practice that many pious Shi'a have turned to because their own mosques remain closed. The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs monitors places of worship, appoints the clergy, approves the building and repair of all places of worship, and approves the publication of all religious literature.

Assyrian religious organizations have claimed that the Government applies apostasy laws in a discriminatory fashion. Assyrians are permitted to convert to Islam, whereas Muslims are forbidden to convert to Christianity.

The Government consistently politicizes and interferes with religious pilgrimages, both of Iraqi Muslims who wish to make the Hajj to Mecca and Medina and of Iraqi and non-Iraqi Muslim pilgrims who travel to holy sites within the country. For example, in 1998 the U.N. Sanctions Committee offered to disburse vouchers for travel and expenses to pilgrims making the Hajj; however, the Government rejected this offer. In 1999 the Sanctions Committee offered to disburse funds to cover Hajj-related expenses via a neutral third party; the Government again rejected the offer. Following the December 1999 passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1284, the Sanctions Committee again sought to devise a protocol to facilitate the payment for

individuals making the journey. The Sanctions Committee proposed to issue \$250 in cash and \$1,750 in travelers checks to each individual pilgrim to be distributed at the U.N. office in Baghdad in the presence of both U.N. and Iraqi officials. The Government again declined and, consequently, no Iraqi pilgrims were able to take advantage of the available funds or, in 2000, of the permitted flights. The Government also has attempted to use pilgrimages to circumvent sanctions for its own financial benefit. In 2001 the Government continued to insist that U.N.-offered funds for Hajj pilgrims be deposited in the government-controlled central bank and placed under the control of government officials for disbursement rather than given to the pilgrims.

Twice each year—on the 10th day of the Muslim month of Muharram and 40 days later in the month of Safar—Shi'a pilgrims from throughout the country and around the world seek to commemorate the death of the Imam Hussein in the city of Karbala. In past years, the Government has denied visas to many foreign pilgrims hoping to come for the Ashura. For example, in 1999 the Government reportedly charged foreign Shi'a pilgrims \$900 for bus passage and food from Damascus to Karbala, a trip that normally would cost about \$150.

The Government does not permit education in languages other than Arabic and Kurdish. Public instruction in Syriac, which was announced under a 1972 decree, never was implemented. Thus, in areas under government control, Assyrian and Chaldean children are not permitted to attend classes in Syriac.

In northern areas under Iraqi Kurdish control, classes in Syriac have been permitted since the 1991 uprising against the Government. There were no reports of elementary school instruction in Syriac being hindered in the north of the country.

During the period covered by this report, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iraq reported receiving several allegations claiming that the Government continues to oppress the Shi'a Muslim community. According to Shi'a religious dignitaries in Iran, the Government continues to arrest Shi'a religious figures, disrupt Shi'a religious ceremonies—sometimes with armed force—and places restrictions on practices by most Shi'a religious leaders. As a consequence, the number of religious scholars, students, and other dignitaries in the seminaries reportedly has declined.

An Islamic group variously known as Jund al-Islam and Ansar al-Islam seized control of portions of the northern part of the country along the Iranian border, imposing a severe form of rule under Islamic law and restricting all non-Islamic worship in the area under its control.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government for decades has conducted a brutal campaign of killing, summary execution, and protracted arbitrary arrest against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and has sought to undermine the identity of minority Christian (Assyrian and Chaldean) and Yazidi groups.

Despite supposed legal protection of religious equality, the regime has repressed severely the Shi'a clergy and those who follow the Shi'a faith. Forces from the Intelligence Service (Mukhabarat), General Security (Amn al-Amm), the Military Bureau, Saddam's Commandos (Fedayeen Saddam), and the Ba'ath Party have killed senior Shi'a clerics, desecrated Shi'a mosques and holy sites (particularly in the aftermath of the 1991 civil uprising), arrested tens of thousands of Shi'a, interfered with Shi'a religious education, prevented Shi'a adherents from performing their religious rites, and fired upon or arrested Shi'a who sought to take part in their religious processions. Security agents reportedly are stationed at all the major Shi'a mosques and shrines, and search, harass, and arbitrarily arrest worshipers.

Shi'a groups reported numerous instances of religious scholars—particularly in the internationally renowned Shi'a academic center of Najaf—being subjected to arrest, assault, and harassment during the period covered by this report. This follows years of government manipulation of the Najaf theological schools. As reported by Amnesty International in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Government systematically deported tens of thousands of Shi'a (both Arabs and Kurds) to Iran, claiming falsely that they were of Persian descent. According to Shi'a sources, religious scholars and Shi'a merchants who supported the schools financially were prime targets for deportation. In the 1980's, during the Iran-Iraq war, it was reported widely that the Government expelled and denied visas to thousands of foreign scholars who wished to study at Najaf. After the 1991 popular uprising, the Government relaxed some restrictions on Shi'a attending the schools; however, this easing of restrictions was followed by an increased government repression of the Shi'a religious establishment, including the requirement that speeches by imams in mosques be based upon government-provided material that attacked fundamentalist trends.

Since the 1980's, the Government reportedly has attempted to eliminate the senior Shi'a religious leadership (the Mirjaiyat) through killings, disappearances, and summary executions.

Since January 1998, the killings of three internationally respected clerics and an attempt on the life of a fourth have been attributed widely to government agents by international human rights activists, other governments, and Shi'a clergy in Iran and Lebanon. Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Murtada al-Borojourni, age 69, was killed in April 1998. Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Mirza Ali al-Gharawi, age 68, was killed in July 1998. Ayatollah Sheikh Bashir al Hussaini escaped an attempt on his life in January 1999. Grand Ayatollah Mohammad al-Sadr, age 66, was killed in February 1999 along with two of his sons. Former U.N. Commission Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Iraq, Max Van Der Stoel, sent a letter in 1999 to the Government expressing his concern that the killings might be part of an organized attack by the Government against the independent leadership of the Shi'a community. The Government has not responded to Van Der Stoel's inquiries.

In the aftermath of these killings, the Government increased repressive activities in the south and in other predominantly Shi'a areas to prevent mourning observances and popular demonstrations. As part of this campaign, two Shi'a scholars in Baghdad, Sheikh Hussain Suwai'dawi, and Sheikh Ali al-Fraijawi, reportedly were executed in July 1998.

In April 1999, the Government executed four Shi'a men for the al-Sadr slaying after a closed trial. Shi'a religious authorities and opposition groups objected to the trial process and contend that the four executed men were innocent. At least one of the four, Sheikh Abdul Hassan Abbas Kufi, a prayer leader in Najaf, reportedly was in prison at the time of the killing. The Shi'a press reported in January 1999 that he had been arrested on December 24, 1998. The three others executed with Kufi were Islamic scholar Ahmad Mustapha Hassan Ardabili, Ali Kathim Mahjan, and Haider Ali Hussain. The status of Ali al-Musawi, another Shi'a cleric accused of complicity in al-Sadr's death, still is unknown. According to a report submitted to the Special Rapporteur in September 1999, one of al-Sadr's sons, Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr, was arrested along with a large number of theological students who had studied under the Ayatollah. Nineteen followers of al-Sadr reportedly were executed toward the end of 1999, including Sheikh Muhammad al-Numani, Friday imam Sheikh Abd-al-Razzaq al-Rabi'i, assistant Friday imam Kazim al-Safi, and students from a religious seminary in Najaf.

Although a funeral for al-Sadr was prohibited, spontaneous gatherings of mourners took place in the days after his death. Government security forces used excessive force in breaking up these illegal religious gatherings. Throughout the country, security forces used automatic weapons and armored vehicles to break up demonstrations, killing, injuring, and arresting hundreds of protesters.

Authorities have targeted suspected supporters of al-Sadr since he was killed in 1999. In February 2000, 30 Najaf religious school students, who were arrested after al-Sadr's death, reportedly were executed. In March 2000, scores of Shi'a who fled the country in 1999 and early 2000 told Human Rights Watch that they had been interrogated repeatedly and, in some cases, detained and tortured. Some were relatives of al-Sadr's students who had been arrested after the killing and others were relatives of other prominent clerics. In May 2000, according to Human Rights Watch, at least six religious students in Najaf who were arrested after al-Sadr's killing were sentenced to death, including Shaikh Salim Jassem al-Abbudi, Shaikh Nasser al-Saa'idi, and Sa'ad al-Nuri. Two clerics, Abdulsattar Abed-Ibrahim al-Mausawi and Ahmad al-Hashemi, reportedly were executed in May 2000 after 6 months' detention. The Government accused them of attempting to discredit the President after they blamed Saddam Hussein for al-Sadr's killing. In late 1999 and early 2000, approximately 4,000 Shi'a families were expelled from Baghdad and sent to southern and western Iraq in reprisal for the disturbances that took place after al-Sadr's death.

Authorities took forceful preemptive measures well ahead of the first anniversary of al-Sadr's killing. Military units were deployed around shrines, mosques, and other religious institutions 2 months before the February anniversary. The Government closed mosques except during prayer time, and the turnout on the holy day of Ashura in April 2001 consequently was many times lower than it had been in the past. In late May 2001, the Ba'ath party reportedly issued orders prohibiting the ritual walking pilgrimage from Najaf to Karbala, a procession marking the end of the 40-day mourning period for Imam Husayn. Travelers reported that security troops opened fire on pilgrims who attempted the pilgrimage.

In 2001 the Special Rapporteur reported that he interviewed the brother of a Shi'a Arab who allegedly was arrested in 1998 for carrying in his car Islamic books and other religious papers. The individual reportedly was executed 5 months later,

along with 70 other persons, on charges of belonging to the Shi'a movement. His family reportedly learned of the execution when government authorities delivered his body to them.

In the aftermath of the al-Sadr killing and subsequent repression, the Shi'a religious community remains in a precarious state. Of the three generally acknowledged senior Shi'a clerics, Ayatollah Ali as-Sistani is forbidden to lead prayers and remains under virtual house arrest in Najaf as a result of attempts on his life; Ayatollah Mohammed Sayeed al-Hakim is forbidden to lead prayers at the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf (or in the adjoining al-Khathra mosque, which has remained closed since 1994); and Ayatollah Hussein Bahr al-Aloom, who was arrested in 1991, reportedly died under questionable circumstances in June 2001. Many scholars at the Shi'a religious schools in Najaf reportedly have been arrested, as have many of al-Sadr's religious appointees throughout the country. These restrictions and abuses had an adverse affect on the development of a new set of Shi'a leaders.

The al-Sadr killing intensified Shi'a anger at the ruling Sunni minority and led to more severe government repression of the Shi'a. The Shi'a resistance also took the form of bolder actions against the regime, including hand grenade and rocket attacks on security headquarters, Ba'ath Party offices, and presidential residences in Baghdad, as well as small arms attacks in many parts of the capital. The al-Amin, Nuwab ad-Dubbat, and al-Nafth districts of Baghdad reportedly have remained in a heightened state of alert every Friday since al-Sadr's death.

Reports of military operations against Shi'a civilians also increased notably in the summer of 1998 after the killings of Ayatollahs Ali al-Gharawi and Sheikh al-Borojourni. In numerous incidents during 1998, security forces injured and summarily executed Shi'a civilians, burned Shi'a homes, confiscated land belonging to Shi'a, and arbitrarily arrested and detained scores of Shi'a.

In January 1999, according to a report from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), security officials reportedly arrested Sheikh Awas, imam of the Nasiriyah city mosque. Shortly after the arrest of Sheikh Awas, hundreds of Shi'a congregation members reportedly marched on the security directorate to demand that Awas be released immediately. Security forces allegedly opened fire on the unarmed crowd with automatic weapons and threw hand grenades. Five persons reportedly were killed, 11 wounded, and 300 arrested.

The Human Rights Organization in Iraq (HROI) reported that 1,093 Shi'a were arrested in June 1999 in Basrah alone. The Iraqi National Congress reports that tanks from the Hammourabi Republican Guard division attacked the towns of Rumaiatha and Khudur in June 1999 after residents protested the systematic unequal distribution of food and medicine to the detriment of the Shi'a. Fourteen villagers were killed, over 100 persons were arrested, and 40 homes were destroyed. In June 1999, SCIRI reported that 160 homes in the Abul Khaseeb district near Basra were destroyed.

In several incidents in 1999, security forces killed and injured Shi'a congregants who gathered to protest closures of various Shi'a mosques.

The Government for several decades has interfered with Ashura holiday commemorations, including interference with the ritual walking pilgrimage to Karbala to mark the end of the 40-day mourning period.

In May 2000, the Government issued orders prohibiting the walking pilgrimage to Karbala. The Government reportedly deployed more than 15,000 Republican Guard troops armed with light weapons and in civilian clothes on the main roads leading into both Karbala and Najaf to enforce the prohibition. Travelers later reported that security troops opened fire on pilgrims who attempted the walk from Najaf to Karbala as part of the 40th day ritual. Shi'a expatriates report that groups as small as 10 to 20 pilgrims attempting to make their way into the city at other times also have been arrested.

While no firm statistics are available regarding the number of religious detainees, observers estimate the total number of security detainees to be in the tens of thousands or more, including numerous religious detainees and prisoners. Some individuals have been held for decades. Others who have remained unaccounted for since their arrests may have died or been executed secretly years ago. The Government reportedly continued to target Shi'a Muslim clergy and their followers for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. While Shi'a are not the only group targeted in this way (others, including Kurds and secular regime opponents, are targeted for ethnic and political reasons), Shi'a are the primary group targeted based on their religion. It is likely that Shi'a constitute the majority of the prison population in the country.

It is difficult to produce an accurate list of persons in prison for their religious beliefs; however, there are some well-known cases of arrest and disappearance on these grounds. For example, in 1991 Iraqi authorities arrested 108 Shi'a clerics and students, including 95-year-old Grand Ayatollah Abu Gharib al-Qassem al-Khoei, 10

of his family members, and 8 of his aides. Ayatollah al-Khoei subsequently was released; however, he was held under house arrest until his death in 1992. The Government also released another person (a foreign national) who was arrested in 1991; however, the fate of the other 106 persons is unknown. In 1992 the Government denied that it knew anything regarding the whereabouts of the missing persons; however, many observers reportedly witnessed their arrests. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of persons have disappeared, and their whereabouts remain unknown. The majority of those targeted have been Shi'a Muslims and Kurds.

Security forces also have forced Shi'a inhabitants of the southern marshes to relocate to major southern cities and to areas along the Iranian border. Former Special Rapporteur van Der Stoel described this practice in his February 1999 report, adding that many other persons have been transferred to detention centers and prisons in central Iraq, primarily in Baghdad. The Government reportedly also continued to move forcibly Shi'a populations from the south to the north to replace Kurds, Turkomen, and Assyrians who had been expelled forcibly from major cities.

The military also continued its water-diversion and other projects in the south. The Government's claim that the drainage is part of a land reclamation plan to increase the acreage of arable land and spur agricultural production is given little credence. Hundreds of square miles have been burned in military operations. The former Special Rapporteur noted the devastating impact that draining the marshes has had on the culture of the Shi'a marsh Arabs. SCIRI claims to have captured government documents that detail the destructive intent of the water diversion program and its connection to "strategic security operations," economic blockade, and "withdrawal of food supply agencies."

The Government's diversion of supplies in the south limited the Shi'a population's access to food, medicine, drinking water, and transportation. According to the former Special Rapporteur and opposition sources, thousands of persons in Nasiriyah and Basra provinces were denied rations that should have been supplied under the U.N. oil-for-food program. In these provinces and in Amarah province, access to food allegedly is used to reward regime supporters and silence opponents. Shi'a groups report that, due to this policy, the humanitarian condition of Shi'a in the south continued to suffer despite a significant expansion of the oil-for-food program.

The former Special Rapporteur and others have reported that the Government has engaged in various abuses against the country's Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, especially in terms of forced movements from northern areas and repression of political rights.

Most Assyrians live in the northern governorates, and the Government often has suspected them of "collaborating" with Iraqi Kurds. In the north, Kurdish groups often refer to Assyrians as Kurdish Christians. Military forces destroyed numerous Assyrian churches during the 1988 Anfal Campaign and reportedly executed and tortured many Assyrians. Both major Kurdish political parties have indicated that the Government occasionally targets Assyrians as well as ethnic Kurds and Turkomen as a part of its Arabization campaign of ethnic cleansing designed to harass and expel non-Arabs from government-controlled areas in the north.

There is evidence that the Government in the past compelled Yazidis to join in domestic military action against Muslim Kurds. Captured government documents included in a 1998 Human Rights Watch report describe special all-Yazidi military detachments formed during the 1988-89 Anfal campaign to "pursue and attack" Muslim Kurds. The Government also has targeted the Yazidis in the past. For example, 33 members of the Yazidi community of Mosul, arrested in July 1996, still are unaccounted for.

Although few Jews remain in the country, government officials frequently make anti-Semitic statements. For example, in 2001 a Ba'th Party official stated that "lowly Jews" were "descendants of monkeys and pigs and worshipers of the infidel tyrant."

In northern Iraq, a newly formed group called the Jund al-Islam seized control of several villages near Halabja in September 2001. The group imposed a severe form of Islamic law, requiring women to adopt Islamic dress codes, banning music and television, restricting or forbidding non-Islamic worship, and administering all civil laws under an extreme version of the Shari'a. After fighting with local authorities, the group agreed to a cease-fire. The group changed its name to Ansar al-Islam and still controls several villages in along the Iranian border.

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 country's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is not reflected in its political and economic structure. Various segments of the Sunni Arab community, which itself constitutes a minority of the population, effectively have controlled the Government since independence in 1932.

Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, have long been disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially.

The Islamic group variously known as Jund al-Islam or Ansar al-Islam continues to impose a severe form of Islamic rule under Shari'a in parts of the north along the Iranian border. The group is intolerant of any religious belief other than its own extreme version of Islam.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus is not able to raise directly with the Government the problems of severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights abuses. However, the U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and in diplomatic contacts with other states.

During the period covered by this report, the President regularly discussed the problems experienced by Shi'a, Christian, and other religious groups in his periodic reports to Congress on Iraq. The Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, in testimony before Congress on Iraq, highlighted the situation of persons in the south. The Voice of America broadcast several editorials dealing with the human rights abuses committed against religious groups by the Government.

It is the policy of the United States to encourage a change of regime in Iraq. The Government is in frequent contact with opposition groups, including religiously oriented Shi'a, Sunni, and Christian groups. All of the groups designated as eligible for assistance under the Iraq Liberation Act have indicated their strong support for religious freedom and tolerance.

In 2001 the Secretary of State designated Iraq a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Iraq was similarly designated in 1999 and 2000.

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Israel¹ has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Basic Law describes Israel as a "Jewish" and "democratic" state. The overwhelming majority of non-Jewish citizens are Muslims, Druze, and Christians. Of this group, most are Arabs, and are subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which have religious dimensions. Israeli Arabs, temporary residents, and other non-Jewish Israelis, are, in fact, generally free to practice their religions.

Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Muslims and Christians, and among the different streams of Judaism—often are strained. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict; such tensions increased significantly during the period covered by this report, due primarily to terrorist attacks, mostly in the form of suicide bombings by Palestinians, and Israel Defense Force (IDF) actions in the occupied territories. The terrorist attacks against civilian targets in Israel impeded many aspects of daily life, including religious practice.

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

Based on its pre-1967 borders, Israel has a total area of approximately 7,685 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.5 million (including Israeli settlers who live in the occupied territories). According to government figures, approximately 80 percent of the population are Jewish, although an unknown number of these citizens do not qualify as Jews according to the definition espoused by Orthodox Judaism. Additionally, non-Jews (usually Christians) who immigrate to the

¹The religious freedom situation in the Occupied Territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

country with their Jewish relatives often are counted as Jews for statistical purposes. According to government figures, among the Jewish population, approximately 4.5 percent are Haredi, or ultra-Orthodox, and another 13 percent are Orthodox. The vast majority of the Jewish population describe themselves as “traditional,” or “secular” Jews, most of whom observe some Jewish traditions. For example, a poll conducted during the period covered by this report found that during Passover, over 80 percent of the country’s Jewish population refrained from eating non-kosher food despite the fact that such food could be purchased in non-Kosher stores and restaurants. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews associate themselves with the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism, which are not officially recognized in the country. A poll released in December 2001 found that the majority of Jews accepted the tenets of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and that the vast majority believed Reform and Conservative weddings conducted in Israel should be recognized by the State. Though they are not officially recognized by the Government, these streams of Judaism do receive a small amount of government funding and are recognized by the country’s courts.

Approximately 20 percent of the population generally are non-Jewish. Of this 20 percent, approximately 80 percent are Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 10 percent Druze. The country’s non-Jewish population is concentrated in the north, east-central, and southern parts of the country. There also are small numbers of evangelical Christians and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Many Israeli Arabs associate themselves with the secular parties in Israel, including the Communist Party, which has a majority Arab membership. Other Israeli Arabs associate with parties aligned with the Islamic Movement or with small, Arab-centered parties. Many Jews also associate with parties representing their religious or ethno-religious beliefs. The remainder of citizens identify with various secular parties.

There are a number of missionary groups operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Declaration of Independence describes the country as a “Jewish state,” but also provides for full social and political equality regardless of religious affiliation. Israeli Arabs and other non-Jews are, in fact, generally free to practice their religions. The discrepancies that exist in the treatment of various communities in society are based on several variables, including the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Due to the historic influence of Orthodox Jewish political parties, the Government implements certain policies based on interpretations of religious law. For example, the national airline, El Al, and public buses in most cities do not operate on the Sabbath; however, some private bus companies operate on Saturday. According to the law, Jews in most professions may not work on the Sabbath. This law generally is enforced in the retail sector; however, it is enforced inconsistently in the entertainment sector. Additionally, streets in some Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods are closed to vehicles on the Sabbath.

The Government recognizes 5 religions, including 10 Christian denominations. The status of some Christian organizations with representation in the country heretofore has been defined by a collection of ad hoc arrangements with various government agencies. Several of these organizations seek to negotiate with the Government in an attempt to formalize their status.

During the period covered by this report, relations between the Israeli Government and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (which represents the largest Christian community in Israel and the occupied territories) were strained by the Israeli Government’s refusal to recognize the duly-elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I. According to a senior Patriarchate official, the Israeli Government withheld its recognition in an attempt to extract legal and political concessions from the Patriarchate. Many local Greek Orthodox Christians perceived the Government’s actions as interference with the internal workings of their church. Another factor for the delay in recognition is that Jewish business associates of some of the defeated Patriarchal candidates reportedly have filed High Court challenges to the election, thereby preventing the Government from endorsing Eirinaios. While the lack of recognition may not hinder the Patriarch’s ability to fulfill his spiritual obligations directly, it may affect his ability to leave and return to Israel without restriction.

At least a few of the IDF soldiers who were killed in action since September 2000 were Muslim, Druze, and Israeli Arab Christian. After the family of one of the soldiers who was killed in February 2000 could not find a Muslim cleric to perform

his burial, there was public debate over the fact that the IDF does not employ a Muslim chaplain. In late 2000, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the IDF to hire a Muslim chaplain; however, by the end of the period covered by this report, the IDF was unable to find a Muslim cleric who was willing to serve as an IDF chaplain.

The Government funds both religious and secular schools in the country, including non-Jewish religious and secular schools. Some secular Jewish schools have adopted a religious education program developed by the non-Orthodox streams. Schools in Arab areas, including Arab parochial schools, receive significantly fewer resources than comparable Jewish schools. During the period covered by this report, the Municipality of Jerusalem attempted to turn control of a declining Jerusalem school over to the Progressive (Reform) movement, which runs a successful school in Haifa. However, after ultra-Orthodox leaders threatened to defeat the Jerusalem mayor in any upcoming elections if the Progressives took control of the school, the offer was rescinded.

Jewish religious holidays such as Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Passover are state holidays. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over Jewish marriages, divorces, and most burials. Many Jewish citizens object to such exclusive control, and it has at times been a source of serious controversy in society.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants automatic citizenship and residence rights to Jewish immigrants and their families. Based on a decision made in 2000 by the Attorney General, residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except to children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete. The Law of Return does not apply to non-Jews or to persons of Jewish descent who have converted to another faith. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside of the country. The Government until this year designated "nationality" (i.e., Arab, Russian, or "Jew," etc.) on national identity documents. Groups representing persons who consider themselves Jewish but who do not meet the Interior Ministry's criteria long have sought a change in the rules, or to have the nationality designation completely removed from identity cards, a move also supported by many Arab groups. In February 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that the Ministry of Interior must register as Jewish 24 persons who had converted in Israel to Judaism through Reform or Conservative conversions (the Government has recognized such conversions performed overseas since 1986). This decision would affect the "nationality" designation on the identification cards of such converts, but not their right to Jewish marriage or burial, which still would be denied. After the Supreme Court's decision, several members of the Knesset announced that they would seek legislation to circumvent the Court's ruling, while others proposed eliminating the nationality clause entirely. At the end of the period covered by this report, new identification cards were being issued without any nationality designation.

The Government has recognized only Jewish holy places under the 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law. The Government states that it also protects the holy sites of other faiths. The Government also states that it has provided funds for some holy sites of other faiths. Muslim groups complain that the Government has been reluctant to refurbish mosques in areas where there is no longer a Muslim population.

A 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits any person from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion; however, there have been no reports of the law's enforcement.

Missionaries are allowed to proselytize, although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) voluntarily refrains from proselytizing under an agreement with the Government. During the period covered by this report, some missionaries complained of difficulties renewing their visas, though their complaints eventually were resolved.

The Government generally continued to permit Muslim citizens to make the Hajj during the period covered by this report. However, for security reasons, the Government imposed restrictions on its Muslim citizens who performed the Hajj, including requiring that they be over the age of 30. The Government does not allow Hajj pilgrims to return if they leave the country without formal permission. The Government justifies these restrictions on the grounds that Saudi Arabia remains officially at war with the country, and that travel to Saudi Arabia therefore is subject to security considerations.

During the period covered by this report, many groups and individuals of all religions traveled to Israel freely. However, the Government at times denied entry to

foreign groups or activists, including Jews, whom it deemed sympathetic to Palestinians or likely to pose a threat to security. In June 2002, the Government denied entry to 20 predominantly Muslim American citizens traveling to the country on a 1-week visit to meet with different religious groups.

The Government states that it is committed to granting equal and fair conditions to Israeli Arabs, particularly in the areas of education, housing, and employment. However, the Government does not provide Israeli Arabs, who constitute approximately 20 percent of the population, with the same quality of education, housing, employment, and social services as Jews. On a per capita basis, the Government spends two-thirds as much for Arabs as for Jews. Although such policies are based on a variety of factors, they reflect de facto discrimination against the country's non-Jewish citizens.

In civic areas in which religion is a determining criterion, such as the religious courts and centers of education, non-Jewish institutions routinely receive less state support than their Orthodox Jewish counterparts. Additionally, National Religious (i.e., modern Orthodox, one of Israel's official Jewish school systems) and Christian parochial schools complain that they receive less funding than secular schools despite the fact that they voluntarily abide by all national curricular standards. During the period covered by this report, the two groups together took their case for equal funding to the High Court.

Government resources available to Arab public schools are less than proportionate to those available to Jewish public schools. Israeli Arab private religious schools are considered among the best in the country; however, parents often must pay tuition for their children to attend such schools due to inadequate government funding. Jewish private religious schools receive significant government funding. Non-Jews are underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities and in the higher level professional and business ranks.

Government funding to the different religious sectors is disproportionate. Non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and the non-Jewish sector receive proportionally less funding than the Orthodox Jewish sector. Only 2 percent of the Ministry of Religious Affairs budget goes to the non-Jewish sector. The High Court of Justice heard a case in 1997 alleging that the budgetary allocation to the non-Jewish sector constituted discrimination. In 1998 the Court ruled that the budget allocation constituted "prima facie discrimination" but that the plaintiff's petition did not provide adequate information about the religious needs of the various communities. In May 2000, the same plaintiffs presented a case on the specific needs of religious communities regarding burials. The court agreed that non-Jewish cemeteries were receiving inadequate resources and ordered the Government to increase funding to such cemeteries; the Government began to implement this decision in 2001, though some groups complained that implementation was too slow.

The Jewish National Fund owns approximately 8 percent of the country's land area and manages another 8 percent on behalf of the Government. The JNF's by-laws prohibit it from selling or leasing land to non-Jews, which has prevented Israeli Arabs from buying homes in JNF developed areas.

Israeli-Arab organizations have challenged the Government's "Master Plan for the Northern Areas of Israel," which listed as priority goals increasing the Galilee's Jewish population and blocking the territorial contiguity of Arab villages and towns, on the grounds that it discriminates against Arab citizens.

Each recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage and divorce. Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring inheritance cases to religious courts. Jewish and Druze families may ask that some family status matters, such as alimony and child custody, be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Christians only may ask that child custody and child support be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Muslims have no recourse to civil courts in family-status matters.

The State does not recognize marriages or conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. In June 2001, the Chief Rabbinate issued new regulations stipulating that immigrants who arrived in the country after 1990 must be investigated to confirm that they are Jewish before they can be married in a Jewish ceremony. Many Israeli Jews who wish to marry in secular or non-Orthodox religious ceremonies do so abroad, and the Ministry of Interior recognizes such marriages. However, many Jewish citizens object to such exclusive control, and it has been at times a source of serious controversy in society, particularly in recent years, as thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union have not been recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities. For example, at least one IDF soldier who considered himself Jewish and was killed in action during the period of this report was not eligible for burial in the Jewish section of a military cemetery because he was

not Jewish under Orthodox Jewish law. After considerable public outcry over the ruling that he was not eligible for a Jewish funeral, the father of the soldier announced that he was satisfied with the portion of the cemetery where his son would be laid to rest, a portion reserved for persons whose Jewishness was in question. Following the Dolphinarium discotheque bombing in June 2001, which killed 21 Israelis, some religious authorities questioned whether several of the young victims, who were immigrants from the former Soviet Union, qualified for Jewish burial. One of the victims ultimately was buried in a special part of a cemetery reserved for persons whose Jewish identity was “in doubt.” Newspapers reported that the decision distressed many Russian immigrants.

Under the Jewish religious courts’ interpretation of personal status law, a Jewish woman may not receive a final writ of divorce without her husband’s consent. Consequently, there are thousands of so-called “agunot” in the country who are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands either have disappeared or refused to grant a divorce.

Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept a divorce from their husbands. At least one man, a U.S. citizen, has been in jail for 3 years because he refuses to grant his wife a writ of divorce. However, in some cases rabbinical courts have failed to invoke sanctions. In cases in which a wife refuses to accept a divorce, the rabbinical courts occasionally allow a husband to take a second wife; however, a wife never may take a second husband. Rabbinical courts also may exercise jurisdiction over and issue sanctions against non-Israeli persons present in the country.

Some Islamic law courts have held that Muslim women may not request a divorce, but that women may be forced to consent if a divorce is granted to a man.

Members of unrecognized religious groups (particularly evangelical Christians) sometimes face problems obtaining marriage certificates or burial services. However, informal arrangements provide relief in some cases.

A group of more than 100 Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform women continued a long legal battle to hold women’s prayer services at the Western Wall. In May 2000, the High Court ruled that women could pray aloud and wear prayer shawls at the Western Wall. In November 2000, an expanded High Court reheard the case; a decision still was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Most Orthodox Jews believe that mixed gender prayer services violate the precepts of Judaism, and Jews generally still are unable to hold egalitarian (mixed gender) prayer services at the Western Wall. The Conservative movement is experimenting with conducting services at a different, recently excavated portion of the wall. The North American Reform Movement has rejected such an alternative.

There were no complaints of harassment of members of Jehovah’s Witnesses during the period covered by this report; however, of the over 120 cases of harassment filed by members of Jehovah’s Witnesses between 1998 and 2000, many still were pending.

There are numerous nongovernmental organizations maintaining dialogue between different religions. Interfaith dialogue often is linked to the peace process between the country and its Arab neighbors.

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 among different religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Christians and Muslims, and among the different streams of Judaism—often are strained. Many Jewish citizens object to the exclusive control the Orthodox Jewish authorities have over Jewish marriages, divorces, and most burials. This has been, at times, a source of serious controversy in society. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and increased significantly during the period covered by this report, due primarily to terrorist attacks, mostly in the form of suicide bombings by Palestinians, and IDF actions in the occupied territories. The terrorist attacks against civilian targets in Israel impeded many aspects of daily life, including religious practice.

On March 27, 2002, a suicide bomber attacked a Passover holiday seder in Netanya, killing 20 persons and injuring over 100. The bomber, who was on a list of wanted terrorists, also died in the explosion.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. Instances of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups or individuals verbally or physically harassing women for “immodest dress” or other violations of their interpretation of religious law are not uncommon in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods.

Observant Jews also faced some discrimination. In May 2001, the Beersheva labor court ruled that employers could not discriminate against employees or job applicants who refuse to work on the Sabbath. The case was brought by an engineer who was refused a position because he did not work on the Sabbath. The judge ruled that “an employer is obligated to behave equally towards job seekers, including setting conditions of acceptance that do not take into account the potential employees’ beliefs or religion, unless the job functions require distinctions, such as work on the Sabbath.”

Israeli Arab groups allege that many employers use the prerequisite of military service to avoid hiring non-Jews, including for jobs that are unrelated to national security.

Societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally are negative. Jews frequently are opposed to missionary activity directed at Jews and occasionally are hostile toward Jewish converts to Christianity. Such attitudes often are attributed to the frequent periods in Jewish history in which Jews were coerced to convert to Christianity.

Christian and Muslim Israeli Arab religious leaders complain that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their community. Muslims consider any conversion from Islam to be apostasy.

In recent years, evangelical Christians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Reform and Conservative Jews complained of incidents of harassment, threats, and vandalism directed against their buildings and other facilities, many of which were committed by two ultra-Orthodox groups, Yad L’Achim and Lev L’Achim. In May 2002, an unidentified person or persons drew a swastika and an epithet on the door of the Israel Religious Action Center, the legal arm of the Reform Movement. The incident occurred apparently in response to plans to turn control of a local school over to the Reform Movement (see Section II).

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy consistently raised issues of religious freedom with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Prime Minister’s office, and the Ministry of the Interior.

In meetings with the Israeli officials, the U.S. Embassy in Israel and State Department officials in Washington have objected to the arbitrary and discriminatory practice of denying some U.S. citizens entry into Israel based on religious and ethnic background.

Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, routinely meet with religious officials. These contacts included meetings with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha’i leaders at a variety of levels.

Embassy officials maintain a dialog with NGO’s that follow human and civil rights issues, including religious freedom. These NGO’s include the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, Adalah, and others.

Embassy representatives attended meetings of groups seeking to promote interfaith dialog, including the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, the Anti-Defamation League, and others. The Embassy provided small grants to local organizations promoting interfaith dialog and to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem during the 1967 War. The West Bank and Gaza Strip now are administered to varying extents by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA does not have a constitution, nor does it have a specific law providing for religious freedom; however, the PA generally respects this right in practice. Although there is no official religion in the occupied territories, Islam is treated de facto as the official religion.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal control in the West Bank. Israel has no constitution; however, Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of the PA’s respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In previous years, there were allegations that a

small number of Muslim converts to Christianity were harassed by PA officials. There was one such allegation during the period covered by the report, but the allegation could not be verified. The Israeli Government's closure policies in the occupied territories restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship, particularly during religious holidays.

There generally are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims. Societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions from Islam. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, are strained. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict; such tensions increased significantly during the period covered by this report. The violence that has occurred since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000 has curtailed significantly religious practice in the occupied territories, including damaging severely places of worship and religious shrines.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The occupied territories are composed of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The Gaza Strip covers an area of 143 square miles, and its population is 1,138,563 persons. The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) covers an area of 2,238 square miles, and its population is approximately 2,191,300 persons. East Jerusalem covers an area of 27 square miles and its population is approximately 390,000 persons.

The vast majority (98.4 percent) of the Palestinian residents of the occupied territories are Sunni Muslims. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, there are 40,055 Palestinian Christians living in the territories. However, according to the sum of estimates provided by individual Christian denominations, the total number of Christians is approximately 200,000. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox (approximately 120,000), and there also are a significant number of Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics (approximately 50,000 total), Protestants, Syrians, Armenians, Copts, Maronites, and Ethiopian Orthodox. In general Christians are concentrated in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. In early 2001, approximately 1,000 Christians from Bethlehem left the occupied territories for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most of the Christians left their homes for economic and security reasons and not due to religious discrimination. Jewish Israeli settlers reside in the West Bank (approximately 171,000), Gaza (approximately 6,500), and Jerusalem. There is a community of approximately 550 Samaritans (an ancient offshoot of Judaism) located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus.

Several evangelical Christian missionary groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, operate in the West Bank.

Foreign missionaries operate in the occupied territories. These include a small number of evangelical Christian pastors who seek to convert Muslims to Christianity. While they maintain a generally low profile, the PA is aware of their activities and generally does not restrict them.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Palestinian Authority has no constitution, and no single law in force protects religious freedom; however, the PA generally respects religious freedom in practice. Although there is no official religion in the occupied territories, Islam is treated de facto as the official religion.

The PA has not adopted legislation regarding religious freedom. However, both the draft Basic Law and the draft Constitution address religion. The draft Basic Law stipulates that "Islam is the official religion in Palestine," and that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (i.e., Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained." The draft Basic Law was submitted for PA President Yasir Arafat's signature in 1997; however, it has not been signed into law. The March 2001 version of a draft constitution stipulates that "Islam is the official religion of the State, while other divine religions and their sanctity are respected." It is unclear whether the injunction to "respect" other religions would translate into an effective legal protection of religious freedom. The draft Basic Law and Constitution both state that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are the primary bases for legislation.

Churches in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza may be subdivided into three general categories: Churches recognized by the status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century; Protestant and evangelical churches

that were established between the late 19th century and 1967, which are not recognized officially by the PA, although they are fully tolerated; and a small number of churches that became active within the last decade, whose legal status is more tenuous.

The first group of churches is governed by the 19th century status quo agreements, which the PA respects and which specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Greek Catholic, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. The Episcopal and Lutheran Churches were added later to the list. These churches and their rights were accepted immediately by the PA, just as the British, Jordanians, and Israelis had done before. Like Shari'a courts under Islam, these religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status issues and some land issues. Civil courts do not adjudicate on such matters.

According to the PA, no other churches have applied for official recognition. However, the second group of churches, which includes the Assembly of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, has unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements. They are permitted to operate freely and are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third group of churches consists of a small number of proselytizing churches, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These groups have encountered opposition in their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims, who oppose their proselytizing, and Christians, who fear that the new arrivals may disrupt the status quo. These churches generally operate unhindered by the PA. At least one of these churches deferred plans to request official recognition from the PA after the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000.

In practice, the PA requires individuals to be at least affiliated with some religion. Religion must be declared on identification papers, and all personal status legal matters must be handled in either Shari'a or Christian ecclesiastical courts. In the absence of legal protection of religious freedom, there are no statutory or regulatory remedies for violations of that freedom.

Islam is the de facto official religion of the Palestinian Authority, and its Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential treatment. The PA has a Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, which pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of many Palestinian imams. The Ministry also provides some Christian clergymen and Christian charitable organizations with limited financial support. The PA does not provide financial support to any Jewish institutions or holy sites in the Occupied Territories; however, it paid for the refurbishment of Joseph's Tomb after it was damaged by Palestinian demonstrators in 2000.

The PA requires that religion be taught in PA schools. There are separate courses for Muslim and Christian students. In 2001 the PA implemented a compulsory curriculum that requires the study of Christianity for Christian students in grades one through six.

The Palestinian Authority observes several religious holidays, including, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. Christians also may observe the holidays of Christmas and Easter.

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialog; however, it attempts to foster goodwill among religious leaders. The PA makes a strong effort to maintain good relations with the Christian community, and there is no pattern of PA harassment of Christians. Within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there is a portfolio responsible for Christian affairs, and PA Chairman Yasir Arafat has an advisor on Christian affairs. Six Christians and 1 Samaritan sit on the 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council in seats set aside for representatives of these religions.

Israel has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Israeli Government gives preferential treatment to Jewish residents of the occupied territories and East Jerusalem in the areas of permits for home building and civic services. For example, Muslim Arab residents of Jerusalem pay the same taxes as Jewish residents; however, Arab residents receive significantly fewer municipal services than Jewish residents. There is a general consensus among Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations that many of the national and municipal policies enacted in Jerusalem are designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. According to these activists, the Israeli Government uses a combination of zoning restrictions on building for Palestinians, confiscation of Palestinian lands, and demolition of Palestinian homes to "contain" non-Jewish neighborhoods.

In recent years, the Israeli Government has attempted to maintain amicable relations with all of the major religious denominations represented in Jerusalem, and

to facilitate their worship requirements. During the period covered by this report, relations between the Israeli Government and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (which represents the largest Christian community in Israel and the occupied territories) were strained by the Israeli Government's refusal to recognize the duly-elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I. According to a senior Patriarchate official, the Israeli Government withheld its recognition in an attempt to extract legal and political concessions from the Patriarchate. Many local Greek Orthodox Christians perceived the Government's actions as interference with the internal workings of their church. Another factor in the delay of recognition was that Jewish business associates of some of the defeated Patriarchal candidates reportedly have filed High Court challenges to the election, thereby preventing the Government from endorsing Eirinaios.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since the outbreak of the Intifada, officials in the PA's Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs have prohibited non-Muslims from entering the sanctuary of the Haram al-Sharif. Waqf officials claimed that this is a temporary closure that was implemented because they cannot justify allowing non-Muslims to visit the Haram al-Sharif at a time when Palestinian Muslims from the occupied territories are prevented from worshipping there. A 1995 ruling by the Israeli High Court of Justice theoretically allowed small numbers of Jews under police escort to pray on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Israeli police consistently have declined to enforce this ruling, citing public safety concerns.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, and the varied ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status issues for Christians. In the West Bank and Gaza, Shari'a pertaining to women is part of the Jordanian Status Law of 1976, which includes inheritances and marriage laws. Under the law, women inherit less than male members of the family do. The marriage law allows men to take more than one wife, although few do so. Women are permitted to make "stipulations" in the marriage contract to protect them in the event of divorce and questions of child custody. However, only an estimated 1 percent of women take advantage of this section of the law, leaving most women at a disadvantage when it comes to divorce or child custody.

Due to the continued Intifada, violence escalated significantly during the period covered by this report. The violent confrontations that had erupted in September 2000 continued on an almost daily basis throughout the period covered by this report, and resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of persons.

Due to the increased violence and security concerns, the Israeli Government imposed closure on the occupied territories in October 2000, and this closure still was in place at the end of the period covered by this report. One result of the closure was to impede significantly freedom of access to places of worship for Muslims and Christians during the period covered by this report. Even before the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000, Palestinians in the occupied territories were required to obtain a permit to enter Jerusalem. The Israeli Government frequently denied requests for permits, and Israeli security personnel at times denied permit holders access to Jerusalem, even to visit holy sites. During periods of closure, Palestinians from the occupied territories were prevented from traveling to pray inside the Haram al-Sharif. In practice Israeli closure policies prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including during religious holidays, such as Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter. On a number of occasions, the Israeli Government also prevented worshippers under the age of 45 from attending Friday prayers inside the Haram al-Sharif. The Israeli Government stated that it did so in an effort to prevent outbreaks of violence following Friday prayers (see Section III). However, many Palestinians believe that the real purpose of closure is ethnically based harassment and humiliation. On April 12, 2002, there were minor clashes in Jerusalem near the Old City's Lion Gate after Israeli police barred male worshippers under the age of 40 from attending afternoon prayers. Those who were refused entry marched in protest and threw stones at the police. No injuries were reported.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Government's continued closure policy prevented a number of Palestinian religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian) from reaching their congregations. The Israeli Government pledged to create a "hotline" to facilitate the movement of clerics through checkpoints in March 2001; however, it had not done so by the end of the period covered by this report. In previous years, several clergymen reported that they were subject to harassment at checkpoints. The Government of Israel announced that it had arrested the Mufti

of Ramallah, interrogated him, and then expelled him from Jerusalem for attempting to attend prayers at al-Aqsa on Friday, September 14, 2001.

Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some settlers from reaching Jewish holy sites in the occupied territories during the period covered by this report. Some Israelis were unable to reach Jewish sites in the occupied territories such as Rachel's Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron due to the ongoing violence, including on religious holidays.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since the establishment of the PA, there have been periodic allegations that a small number of Muslim converts to Christianity at times are subjected to societal discrimination and harassment by PA officials, including detention and questioning by security forces. During the period covered by this report, there was one such allegation. The allegation could not be verified. With regard to other allegations of mistreatment in recent years, conversion may have been only one of several factors leading to the mistreatment. In previous years, the PA stated that it investigated such allegations; however, it did not make available the results of these investigations.

During the period covered by this report, several Christian religious leaders and lay members were deliberately mistreated or accidentally injured by Israeli forces. On April 4, 2002, patriarchs of several major Christian denominations in Jerusalem claimed that the IDF forcibly entered numerous churches in Bethlehem and Ramallah and mistreated clergymen. For example, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop claimed that an IDF unit entered a Syrian Orthodox Church in Bethlehem, damaged property, and threatened a 70-year-old priest with a gun. On April 7, 2002, an Israeli army unit operating in Ramallah forced its way into the Lutheran Church of Hope and used the pastor as a human shield, forcing him to walk ahead of the unit into potentially hostile areas as it searched the premises. On April 8, another Israeli army unit similarly used a Christian religious leader, Reverend Ramez Ansara of the Lutheran Evangelical Church. On April 10, an IDF sniper shot and wounded an Armenian lay monk during the stand-off at the Church of the Nativity.

According to some Palestinian individuals and human rights organizations, Israeli soldiers at times arbitrarily enforced closure in such a way as to interfere with Muslim religious practices. In particular there were allegations that Israeli soldiers closed the al-Ram checkpoint at sundown late in 2001 during Ramadan, thereby preventing thousands of Muslims from returning home to break their fasts. There also were several unconfirmed accounts of IDF personnel at checkpoints coercing Palestinians into breaking their fasts during Ramadan as a condition for being allowed to pass through the checkpoint. There were no reports of any disciplinary action taken against the soldiers.

On June 4, 2001, the day that Muslims celebrated the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, IDF personnel closed the al-Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron in violation of the Hebron Protocol, which stipulates that the mosque should be available to Muslim worshippers on Muslim holidays. Israeli police personnel also arrested seven Muslims who were near the mosque.

Although it is difficult to assess culpability in the destruction of and damage to many places of worship in the occupied territories, their destruction or damage affects the practice of religion and religious freedom. Among the sites damaged were St. Mary's Convent, the chapel at Bethlehem University, the Lutheran Church and orphanage in Beit Jala, the Latin Convent in Beit Sahour, the Bethlehem Bible College, a Syrian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Pilgrim's House, and the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Mosque. The ninth century al-Khader Mosque in Nablus, reputed to be the oldest mosque in the occupied territories, and the church of Mar Mitri, the oldest Christian church in Nablus, both were destroyed.

Throughout the period covered by this report, there were credible accounts of Israeli soldiers acting on their own causing damage to Palestinian church property. In Bethlehem gun and tank fire damaged the Holy Family Hospital, the Lutheran Christmas Church, and the Dar al-Kalima Academy. Such damage often was extensive and included destruction of church and school property, including religious symbols. Damage in a number of these cases exceeded \$85,000, and the institutions have filed claims for restitution with the Israeli Government. The Israeli Government did not refurbish any of the places of worship that the IDF damaged while operating in the occupied territories, and denied requests for compensation submitted in that regard. The Government stated that it was not responsible for damages incurred during a state of war.

Armed action by Palestinian gunmen and members of the Palestinian security services against Israeli forces damaged some religious buildings. During an April 2002 armed standoff between Israeli forces and a group of approximately 160 Pales-

tinian gunmen, including PA security forces, the Church of the Nativity, the Latin (Roman Catholic) section of the Nativity compound, and the Greek Orthodox and Armenian monasteries sustained considerable material damage.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the occupied territories.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

Generally there are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims. However, tensions do exist and occasionally surface. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, often are strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance.

Societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity. One senior Christian cleric reportedly quietly dissuaded a number of such prospective converts from being baptized in Jerusalem for fear that they would be ostracized by their families or subjected to violence. In previous years, there were reports that some Christian converts from Islam who publicized their religious beliefs were harassed.

There are some reports of Christian-Muslim tension in the occupied territories. For example, sectarian tensions were visible on January 31, 2002, after a Palestinian Christian taxi driver stabbed and killed a Muslim during a dispute at the Qalandiya checkpoint. That night male friends and relatives of the Muslim retaliated by attacking Christian-owned shops and residences in Ramallah. In addition there have been periodic accusations that Muslim Tanzim militia members deliberately opened fire on the Israeli neighborhood of Gilo from Christian areas in Beit Jala in order to draw IDF fire onto the Christian homes. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians have accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Interfaith romance is a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in the occupied territories encourage their children—especially their daughters—to marry within the faith. Couples that have challenged this societal norm have encountered considerable societal and familial opposition. Some Christian women who have married Muslim men received death threats from Christian family members and community figures.

In general evangelical churches have not been welcomed by the more established Christian denominations.

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the occupied territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders has been harsher since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000. During the first year of the Intifada there were also a number of attacks on Muslim and Jewish places of worship and religious shrines in the occupied territories.

There again were some reports of settler violence against Palestinian places of worship during the period covered by this report. On October 21, 2001, Israeli settlers vandalized the al-Kayyal Mosque in Hebron.

During the period covered by this report, Muslims on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on several occasions threw stones over a high wall onto the Western Wall plaza where Jews were praying.

The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders was harsh and at times constituted an incitement to violence during the period covered by this report. For example, PA-controlled television stations frequently broadcast anti-Semitic statements by Palestinian political and spiritual leaders and PA officials. Some prominent Israelis also made public anti-Arab statements.

Instances of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups verbally or physically harassing Jewish citizens for “immodest dress” or other violations of their interpretation of religious law occurred in previous years. There also were instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews harassing Christians and Muslims. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews known as the “Temple Mount Faithful” attempted to force their way inside the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. In addition, the same group periodically attempted to lay a cornerstone for the building of a new Jewish temple that would replace the Islamic Dome of the Rock shrine, an

act that local Muslims considered an affront. On May 13, 2002, a group of Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews) interrupted an evangelical Christian conference in Jerusalem and threw a stink bomb into the congregation. Conference organizers accused the Haredim of stealing sound equipment during the incident.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem maintains an ongoing, dialog with officials in the Palestinian Authority, and (in conjunction with Embassy Tel Aviv) with Israeli officials on human rights issues, including issues of religious freedom. The Consulate also maintains contacts with representatives of the Islamic Waqf—an Islamic trust and charitable organization that owns and manages large amounts of real estate, including the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem—as well as with the various Christian churches and Jewish communities in Jerusalem.

The Consulate investigates allegations of abuses of religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, the Consulate investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, allegations of incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites.

JORDAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with “public order and morality;” however, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of unrecognized religious groups and religious converts from Islam face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases. The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims.

Relations between Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable. Adherents of unrecognized religions face some societal discrimination.

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 55,436 square miles and its population is approximately 5 million persons. Over 95 percent of the population are Sunni Muslim. Official government figures estimate that Christians make up 4 percent of the population; however, government and Christian officials privately estimate the true figure to be closer to 3 percent. There also are at least 20,000 Druze, a small number of Shi’a Muslims, and less than 800 adherents of the Baha’i faith. There are no statistics available regarding the number of atheists or persons who are not adherents of any particular religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-Day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Presbyterian Churches. Other churches, including the Baptist Church, the Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assembly of God, and the Christian Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Justice as “societies,” but not as churches. Some Egyptian immigrants are adherents of Coptic Church. There also are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Muslim Shi’a represented in the immigrant Iraqi population.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of particular religious groups. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq is predominantly Druze, as is Umm Al-Jamal in the city of Mafraq. There also are significant populations of Druze in Amman and Zarka, and a smaller number of Druze in Irbid and Aqaba. There are a number of nonindigenous Shi’a living in the Jordan Valley and the south.

Foreign missionaries operating in the country include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons); Jehovah’s Witnesses; Campus Crusaders for Christ; Life Agape; Intersity; Navigators; Christar; Arab World Ministries; Operation Mobilization; Southern Baptist International Mission Board; the Conservative Baptist; Frontiers; Brother Andrew; the Jesuits; Christian Brothers; Rosary Sisters;

Benedictines; Anglican Church Mission Society; the Society of Friends (Quakers); Comboni Sisters; Little Sisters of Jesus; the Religious of Nazareth; Sisters of St. Dorothy; the Daughters of Mary the Helper (Salesian Sisters); the Little Sisters of Nazareth; the Little Family of the Annunciation; Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition; Basiliennes Chouerites; Focolare Sisters; Franciscans (OFM); Sons of Divine Providence (Don Orione Fathers); Association Fraternal International (AFI); Institute of the Incarnate Word; Franciscans of the Cross; Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine; Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM); Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; Daughters of Mary of the Enclosed Garden; Theresian Institute; and the Missionaries of Charity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the protection of "all forms of worship and religious rites in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, unless such is inconsistent with public order or morality;" however, the Government imposes some restrictions on freedom of religion. The Constitution also provides that "there shall be no legal discrimination with regard to Jordanians' rights and duties based on race, language, or religion;" however, those who are members of religions not recognized by Shari'a law (members of religions other than Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and those who convert from Islam may face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases.

According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion. Neither Islam nor the Government recognize religious faiths other than the three main monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. While Christianity is recognized as a religion and non-Muslim citizens may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and to perform marriages and other sacraments. Since 1998 the Prime Minister unofficially has conferred with an interfaith council of bishops representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches in the country. The Government uses the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: the faith does not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the faith is recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith does not oppose the national religion; and the group includes some citizen followers.

According to the Government, the role of the State in religious affairs is limited to supervision. Groups that have practices that violate the law and the nature of Jordanian society are prohibited; however, in practice, there were no reports that religious groups were banned.

Religious institutions, such as churches that wish to receive official government recognition, must apply to the Prime Ministry for registration. Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent from the Government and are tax-exempt.

Religious instruction is mandatory for all Muslim students in public schools. Christian and Baha'i students are not required to attend courses in Islam. In 1996 the late King Hussein and the Ministry of Education approved religious instruction for Christian students in public schools. In 1998 the Government launched an experimental program in four districts to incorporate Christian education in the public school curriculum. In 1999 the local Council of Bishops approved the use of the Syrian model of catechism in these test districts; however, the program has not progressed due to a lack of attention by either the Ministry of Education or the local Christian hierarchy.

The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own members "provided that they comply with the general provision of the law and are subject to the control of government in matters relating to their curricula and orientation."

The Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, the Prophet's Ascension, and the Islamic New Year are celebrated as national holidays. Christmas and the Gregorian Calendar New Year also are national holidays. Easter is a government holiday for Christians and Christians may request leave for other Christian feasts prescribed by the local Council of Bishops.

There are two major government-sponsored institutions that promote interfaith understanding: The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (al-Bayt Foundation). Both institutions sponsor research, international conferences, and discussions on a wide range of religious, social, and historical questions from the perspective of both Muslims and Christians.

The Government facilitated holding an international Christian conference in government facilities in May 2001 and planned to hold another conference during the summer of 2002.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i Faiths as official religions but does not prohibit the practice of these faiths. Druze face official discrimination but do not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is face both official and social discrimination. The Government does not record the bearer's religion on national identity cards issued to Druze or Baha'is. The small Druze and Baha'i communities do not have their own courts to adjudicate personal status and family matters; such matters are heard in Shari'a courts. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq, and four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies." The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, but each denomination is allowed to conduct religious services and activities without interference.

The Government does not interfere with public worship by the country's Christian minority. Although the majority of Christians are allowed to practice freely, some activities, such as encouraging Muslims to convert to Christianity, which is considered legally incompatible with Islam—are prohibited.

In June 2000, the Government closed an Arab Orthodox church in Amman that was aligned with the Antioch Patriarch in Damascus, Syria, due to a dispute stemming from an intrachurch rivalry between the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the Antioch Orthodox Patriarchate. Both are members of the Greek Orthodox Church but are affiliated with different geographical divisions. The Government closed the church following a request from the local Orthodox hierarchy to enforce a 1958 law that grants the Jerusalem Patriarchate authority over all Orthodox churches in the country. The church reopened in December 2000 with permission from the Government, but was closed again 1 week later based largely on pressure from the Orthodox hierarchy. The Government stated that the church was free to open under a different name that would not imply affiliation with the Orthodox Church. The church remained closed at the end of the period covered by this report (see Section III).

Shari'a law prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Conversion to the Muslim faith by Christians is allowed; however, a Muslim may not convert to another religion. The small number of Muslims who convert to other faiths claim of social and government discrimination. The Government does not fully recognize the legality of such conversions. Under Shari'a converts are regarded as apostates and legally may be denied their property and other rights. However, in practice this principle is not applied. According to the Government, it neither encourages nor prohibits apostasy. However, converts from Islam do not fall under the jurisdiction of their new religion's laws in matters of personal status and still are considered Muslims under Shari'a. Converts to Islam remain under the jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts. Shari'a law prescribes the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion; however, there is no corresponding statute under national law, and such punishment never has been applied.

According to one Christian cleric, the Government generally does not prohibit citizens from proselytizing if it is within the limits of the law and based on "the principle of maintaining personal security and safety and provided that it does not contradict the customs and traditions of society." Government policy requires that foreign missionary groups (that the Government believes are not familiar with the customs and traditions of Jordanian society) refrain from public proselytizing "for the sake of their own personal safety from fundamentalist members of society that oppose such practices."

In the past, the Government has taken action against some Christian proselytizers in response to the complaints of recognized Christian groups who charged that the activities of these missionaries "disrupt the cohesiveness and peace between religious groups in the society."

In the past, there have been some reports of local government officials encouraging Christian females involved in relationships with Muslim males to convert to Islam to diffuse family or tribal disputes caused by the relationship (see Section III). However, there were no known cases in which local officials harassed or coerced individuals to convert during the period covered by this report.

Noncitizen Christian missionaries operate in the country but are subject to restrictions. Christian missionaries may not proselytize Muslims. During the period covered by this report, Christian mission groups in the country complained of difficulty in dealing with local intra-church politics.

In February 2000, the governor of the Amman municipality closed the office of Life Agape—an organization associated with the Baptist Church—after the director refused to sign a letter stating that he would not “deal with Muslims.” The office was closed indefinitely. The members of the organization currently were meeting at a Baptist Church in Amman, without objection from the Amman municipality, to pursue their activities, at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April and September 1999, a foreign employee of a small language school in Amman applied for a residence permit from the Ministry of Interior. His application was denied, reportedly because government officials believed that he had been attempting to convert Muslims to Christianity. He reapplied in April 2000 and continued to await a response from the Government at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, still had not been accredited by the end of the period covered by this report. As a result, students and faculty from the U.S. and elsewhere wishing to attend JETS still were unable to obtain student visas. JETS continued its operations with students studying on tourist visas.

Of the 80 seats in the Lower House of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians. No seats are reserved for Druze or adherents of other religious faiths. In June 2001, the King dissolved Parliament and charged the Government with drafting a new election law. The country’s parliamentary election law historically has limited the number of Islamists elected to Parliament. The major Islamic political party boycotted the 1997 elections, stating that the election law must be amended before it would participate in future elections. In March 2000, Jordan University amended the student council election law, granting the university president the authority to appoint half of the university’s 80-member student council, including the chairmanship. This decision reportedly was made to curb the influence of Islamists on campus.

The Political Parties Law prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity. The law was designed primarily to prevent Islamist politicians from preaching in mosques.

The Press and Publications Department continued its April 2000 ban on a book of poetry by Ziyad Al-Anani. The book contained a poem that reportedly was offensive to Islam.

In early 2000, radical Islamists criticized a poem published by Muslim poet Musa Hawamdeh. In March 2000, the Government banned the book in which the poem was published. In June 2000, Hawamdeh was summoned to a Shari’a court to face allegations of apostasy. In July 2000, Hawamdeh, without retracting any portion of his poem, was acquitted on all charges in both the Shari’a and civil courts. After Hawamdeh’s acquittal, he was subpoenaed in October 2001 by the Shari’a Court because of technicalities in his previous case, which may allow him to be tried again. Since October 2001, there has been no further activity with regarding to the retrial, and most legal experts believe that Hawamdeh would be acquitted if tried again. However, some observers believe that the procedural error is being used as a pretext to continue harassing the poet.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government loosely monitors sermons at mosques and requires that speakers refrain from criticizing the royal family or instigating social or political unrest.

According to the Constitution, religious community trusts (“Awqaf”) and matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari’a courts for Muslims, and separate non-Muslim tribunals for each religious community recognized by the Government. There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. The head of the department that manages Shari’a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari’a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as “societies” come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

Shari’a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father, and all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance.

All minor children of a male citizen who converts to Islam automatically are considered to be Muslim. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not themselves convert to Islam. In cases in which a Muslim converts to Christianity, the conversion is not recognized legally by the authorities, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law. The minor children of a male Muslim who converts to Christianity continue to be treated as Muslims under the law.

In 1998 custody of the children of a Christian woman living in Irbid was granted, against her will, to the Muslim brother of her deceased husband. A civil court held that Shari'a law revoked the mother's custody of the children because she had failed to raise them as Muslims. The children had been raised as Christians because both their mother and father originally were Christian. Their father converted to Islam shortly before his death. As a result of his conversion, the children were considered to be Muslim as a matter of Shari'a law. However, the mother, lawfully remained Christian. The civil court rejected the mother's final appeal in February 2002; however, the court's final judgment had yet to be enforced by the end of the period covered by this report.

Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their faith's religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Many such individuals convert to another Christian denomination or the Muslim faith in order to divorce legally.

The Government notes individuals' religions (except for Druze, Baha'is, and other unrecognized religions) on the national identity card and "family book" (a national registration record that is issued to the head of every family and that serves as proof of citizenship) of all citizens. Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for official identification purposes."

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians; however, all senior command positions traditionally have been reserved for Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer for certain occasions. There is no Christian clergy in the military.

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, all citizens, including non-Muslims, are discouraged from eating, drinking, or smoking in public or in vehicles and are discouraged strongly from dressing in a manner that is considered inconsistent with Islamic standards. Restaurants are closed during daylight hours unless specifically exempted by the Government. Only those facilities catering specifically to tourists are allowed to remain open during the daytime and sell alcohol during the month of Ramadan.

Under Shari'a as applied in the country, female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, and non-Muslim widows of Muslim spouses have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half of her parents' estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits both of his parents' property. Male Muslim heirs have the duty to provide for all family members who need assistance. Men are able to divorce their spouses more easily than women are, although a law passed in December 2001 allows women to divorce their husbands in Shari'a Court. Since the law went into effect, Shari'a courts have granted two divorces brought by women.

Shari'a as applied in the country regards the testimony of a woman to be equal to half that of a man. This provision technically applies only in religious courts; however, in the past it has been imposed in civil courts as well, regardless of religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners who remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report; however, the security services detained approximately 50 persons, described in the press as "Islamists" in 2000 and 2001. Such detentions were related to allegations of involvement in terrorist or strictly political activities rather than religious affiliation or belief.

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. However, according to the law the father of the child may restrict a child's travel. There reportedly are at least 39 cases of U.S. citizen children residing in Jordan against the will of their U.S. citizen mothers. Under the law, such children are considered Muslim if their fathers are Muslim.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite efforts by Islamic fundamentalists, the criminal court and Shari'a court acquitted poet Musa Hawamdeh of charges that he had "insulted religious values and defamed prophets" in a poem he wrote. Although an effort is underway to retry him, most legal experts believe he would be acquitted again.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable. Relations within the Christian community sometimes are difficult, especially among the evangelical Christian community. There are disputes between and within different Christian denominations. In June 2000, due to a dispute stemming from an intrachurch rivalry between the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the Antioch Orthodox Patriarchate, the Government closed an Arab Orthodox church in Amman, which was aligned with the Antioch Patriarch in Damascus, Syria (see Section II).

In general Christians do not suffer discrimination. Christians hold high-level government and private sector positions and are represented in the media and academia approximately in proportion to their presence in the general population. Senior command positions in the military traditionally have been reserved for Muslims (see Section II). Baha'is face some societal and official discrimination. Employment applications occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion.

The majority of the indigenous population views religion as central to personal identity and religious conversions are not tolerated widely. Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. There is anecdotal evidence that the number of romantic relationships between members of different religions is growing. Such relationships, which ultimately may lead to conversion (either to the Muslim or Christian faiths) usually, are strongly discouraged by the families. Interfaith relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple, or feuds between members of the couple's families. When such situations arise, families may approach local government officials for resolution. There were reports that in some cases, local government officials encouraged Christian women involved in relationships with Muslim men to convert to Islam in order to defuse potential family or tribal problems; however, during the period covered by this report, there were no known cases in which local officials harassed or coerced persons to convert from Christianity to Islam. In previous years, when the Government intervened in such cases, it at times placed the women concerned into "protective custody" to prevent retribution by one of the families. During the period covered by this report, there were some cases of mixed faith married couples seeking to emigrate to other countries because of the negative family and societal reactions to their marriages.

During the period covered by this report, local newspapers occasionally published articles critical of evangelical organizations.

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.

U.S. Embassy officials raised religious freedom and other human rights issues with government authorities on a number of occasions. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities in the country, as well as with private religious organizations. Embassy officers assisted private religious groups to obtain official registration during the period covered by this report. The Embassy's American Citizens' Services officer is in regular contact with members of the American missionary community in the country.

In February 2002, the Embassy sponsored a successful program on religious tolerance by Dr. David Forte, a professor of law at Cleveland State University. In January 2001, the Embassy sponsored a successful program on interreligious dialog and tolerance by Dr. Mahmoud Ayoub, a professor of religion at a university in the United States.

KUWAIT

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, "provided that

it does not conflict with public policy or morals." Islam is the state religion. The Constitution states that Shari'a (Islamic law) is "a main source of legislation."

There was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government approved the construction of three new Shi'a mosques. An Apostolic Nunciature was established in the country to represent Vatican interests in the region.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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's total area is 6,880 square miles, and its population is 2.25 million. Of the country's total population, approximately 1.6 million persons are Muslim, including the vast majority of its 855,000 citizens. The remainder of the overall population consists of the large foreign labor force and approximately 70,000 Arabs with residence ties to Kuwait who claim to have no documentation of their nationality. While the national census does not distinguish between Sunni and Shi'a adherents, the ruling family and many prominent families belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The total Sunni Muslim population is well over 1 million, approximately 525,000 of whom are citizens. The remaining 30 to 40 percent of Muslim citizens (approximately 250,000–350,000) are Shi'a, as are approximately 100,000 noncitizen residents. Estimates of the nominal Christian population range from 250,000 to 500,000 (including approximately 200 citizens, most of whom belong to 12 large families).

The Christian community includes the Roman Catholic Diocese, with 2 churches and an estimated 100,000 members (Maronite Christians also worship at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait city); the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church, with 115 members (several thousand other Christians use the Anglican Church for worship services); the National Evangelical Church (Protestant), with 3 main congregations (Arabic, English, and "Malayalee") and 15,000 members (several other Christian denominations also worship at the National Evangelical Church Compound); the Greek Orthodox Church (referred to locally as the "Roman Orthodox" Church), with 3,500 members; the Armenian Orthodox Church, with 4,000 members; the Coptic Orthodox Church, with 70,000 members; and the Greek Catholic (Eastern Rite) Church, whose membership totals are unavailable. In September 2001, the diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Kuwait were upgraded to ambassadorial status.

There are many other unrecognized Christian denominations in the country, with tens of thousands of members. These denominations include Seventh-Day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Marthoma, and the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church.

There are also members of religions not sanctioned in the Koran, such as Hindus (100,000 adherents), Sikhs (10,000), Baha'is (400), and Buddhists (no statistics available).

There are no available statistics on the number of atheists.

Missionary groups in the country serve non-Muslim congregations.

SECTION II: STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, "provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals." Islam is the state religion. The Constitution states that Shari'a is "a main source of legislation." The Government observes Islamic holidays.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups are unclear. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has official responsibility for overseeing religious groups. Officially recognized churches must deal with a variety of government entities, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for visas and residence permits for pastors and other staff) and the municipality of Kuwait (for building permits). While there reportedly is no official government "list" of recognized churches, seven Christian churches have at least some form of official recognition that enables them to operate openly. These seven churches have open "files" at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, allowing them to bring in the pastors and staff necessary to operate their churches. Further, by tradition three of the country's churches are widely recognized as enjoying "full recognition" by the Government and are allowed to operate compounds officially designated as churches: The Catholic

Church (both the Roman Catholic Church and the Maronite Church), the Anglican Church, and the National Evangelical Protestant Church of Kuwait.

The other four churches reportedly are allowed to operate openly, hire employees, invite religious speakers, etc., all without interference from the Government; however, their compounds are, according to government records, registered only as private homes. Church officials themselves appear uncertain about the guidelines or procedures for recognition. Some claim that these procedures are purposely kept vague by the Government to maintain the status quo. No other churches and religions have legal status but they are allowed to operate in private homes.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups also appear to be connected with government restrictions on nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), religious or otherwise. In 1993 all unlicensed organizations were ordered by the Council of Ministers to cease their activities. This order never has been enforced; however, since that time all but three applications by NGO's have been frozen. There were reports that in the last few years at least two groups have applied for permission to build their own churches, but the Government has not responded to their requests. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Government announced in October 2001 that all unlicensed branches of Islamic charities would be closed by the end of 2002. In August 2002, the Acting Minister of Social Affairs and Labor issued a ministerial decree to create a charitable organizations department within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The new department will regulate Kuwaiti based religious charities by reviewing their applications for registration, monitor the operations of charities, and establish a new accounting system to comply with regulations of charity based operations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shi'a are free to conduct their traditional forms of worship without government interference; however, members of the Shi'a community have expressed concern about the scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new Shi'a mosques and the repair of existing mosques. (There are approximately 36 Shi'a mosques, compared to 1,300 Sunni mosques, in the country.) During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to address these concerns by approving the construction of three new Shi'a mosques. The Shi'a appellate court for family law cases and the Shi'a charity authority established in 2001 reportedly are operating smoothly.

Shi'a leaders also have claimed that Shi'a who aspire to serve as imams are forced to seek appropriate training and education abroad due to the lack of Shi'a jurisprudence courses at Kuwait University's College of Islamic Law, which only offers Sunni jurisprudence courses. However, to address this longstanding concern the Ministry of Education currently is reviewing an application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics within the country. If approved the new college could reduce Shi'a dependence on foreign study, particularly in Iran, for the training of Shi'a clerics.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, National Evangelical, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Greek Catholic Churches operate freely on their compounds, holding worship services without government interference. These leaders also state that the Government generally has been supportive of their presence, even providing police security and traffic control as needed. Other Christian denominations (including Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Marthoma, and Indian Orthodox) are not recognized legally, but are allowed to operate in private homes or in the facilities of recognized churches. Members of these congregations have reported that they are able to worship without government interference, provided that they do not disturb their neighbors and do not violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

Members of religions not sanctioned in the Koran, such as Hindus and Buddhists, may not build places of worship, but are allowed to worship privately in their homes without interference from the Government.

In January 2002, after mounting pressure from Kuwaiti residents in the district of Salwa, the Government ordered the closure of the Sikh temple, Gurudwara. Sikhs who worshipped in Gurudwara temple must now worship at another Sikh temple.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing to Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations. The law prohibits organized religious education for religions other than Islam, although this law is not enforced rigidly. Informal religious instruction occurs inside private homes and on church compounds without government interference. However, there were reports that government inspectors from the Awqaf Ministry periodically visit public and private schools outside of church compounds to ensure that religious teaching other than Islam does not take place. The Roman Catholic Church has requested that Catholic students

be allowed to study the catechism separately during the period in which Muslim students receive mandatory instruction in Islam. The Government did not respond to the request.

The Roman Catholic Church faces problems of overcrowding at its two official church facilities. Its cathedral in downtown Kuwait City regularly draws as many as 100,000 worshippers to its more than 30 weekly services. Due to limited space on the compound, the church is unable to construct any new buildings.

The Government recently notified the Coptic Church of its intention to reacquire the parcel of land on which the country's only Coptic church is located for a road project, which will begin in 2 years. The Government plans to grant the Church a land parcel of equal or greater size in the same general vicinity to relocate the church, but it has not guaranteed financial assistance to construct a new church.

The Government does not permit the establishment of non-Islamic publishing companies or training institutions for clergy. Nevertheless, several churches publish religious materials for use solely by their congregations. Further, some churches, in the privacy of their compounds, provide informal instruction to individuals interested in joining the clergy.

A private company, the Book House Company Ltd., is permitted to import a significant number of Bibles and other Christian religious material—including, as of early 2000, videotapes and compact discs—for use solely among the congregations of the country's recognized churches. The Book House Company is the only bookstore that has an import license to bring in such materials, which also must be approved by government censors. There have been reports of private citizens having non-Islamic religious materials confiscated by customs officials upon arrival at the airport.

Although there is a small community of Christian citizens, a law passed in 1980 prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims. However, citizens who were Christians before 1980 (and children born to families of such citizens since that date) are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children.

According to the law, a non-Muslim male must convert to Islam when he marries a Muslim woman if the wedding is to be legal in the country. A non-Muslim female is not required to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim male, but it is to her advantage to do so. Failure to convert may mean that, should the couple later divorce, the Muslim father would be granted custody of any children.

Women continue to experience legal and social discrimination. In the family courts, one man's testimony is sometimes given the same weight as the testimony of two women; however, in the civil, criminal, and administrative courts, the testimony of women and men is considered equally. Unmarried women 21 years old and over are free to obtain a passport and travel abroad at any time. However, married women who apply for passports must obtain their husbands' signature on the application form. Once she has a passport, a married woman does not need her husband's permission to travel, but he may prevent her departure from the country by contacting the immigration authorities and placing a 24-hour travel ban on her. After this 24-hour period, a court order is required if the husband still wishes to prevent his wife from leaving the country. All minor children must have their father's permission to travel outside of the country.

Inheritance is governed by Islamic law, which differs according to the branch of Islam. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shi'a women may inherit all property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion, with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

The law requires jail terms for journalists who ridicule religion. There were no reports during the period covered by this report of Islamists using this law to threaten writers with prosecution for publishing opinions deemed insufficiently observant of Islamic norms as had occurred in the past, nor were there any instances of religiously based prosecutions of authors or journalists.

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. There have been cases in which U.S. citizen children have been abducted from the United States and not allowed to return (under the law, the father receives custody in such cases, and his permission is required for the children to leave the country); however, there were no reports that such children were forced to convert to Islam, or that forced conversion was the reason that they were not allowed to return.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect For Religious Freedom

The overall situation for Shi'a improved during the period covered by this report. The Government approved the construction of three new Shi'a mosques in addition to the three that were approved in 2001, bringing the total to 36 Shi'a mosques in the country. The Government is currently considering a request to establish a Shi'a "Supreme Court" to handle matters of family law. Shi'a leaders no longer express concern that proposed legislation in the National Assembly does not take their beliefs into account.

An Apostolic Nunciature (Vatican embassy), headed by an Apostolic Nuncio (Ambassador), accredited to Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen, was upgraded from charge d'affaires to full ambassadorial status in September 2001, to represent Vatican interests in the region. The Vatican Ambassador is resident in Kuwait City. The Catholic Church views the Government's agreement to upgrade to full diplomatic relations with the Vatican as significant in terms of government tolerance of Christianity.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations among the various religions, and citizens generally are open and tolerant of other religions, although there is a small minority of ultraconservatives opposed to the presence of non-Muslim groups.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurs on a personal level, most observers agree that it is not widespread. There is a perception among some domestic employees and other members of the unskilled labor force, particularly nationals of Southeast Asian countries, that they would receive better treatment from employers as well as society as a whole if they converted to Islam. However, others do not see conversion to Islam as a factor in this regard.

The conversion of Muslims to other religions is a very sensitive matter. While such conversions reportedly have occurred, they have been done quietly and discreetly. Muslim conversions that become public are likely to cause hostility within society.

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 the promoting human rights.

U.S. Embassy officials frequently meet with representatives from Sunni, Shi'a, and various Christian groups. Intensive monitoring of religious issues has long been an embassy priority. Embassy officers have met with most of the leaders of the country's recognized Christian churches, as well as representatives of various unrecognized faiths. Such meetings have afforded embassy officials the opportunity to learn the status and concerns of these groups.

LEBANON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Discrimination based on religion is built into the system of government.

Citizens still are struggling with the legacy of a 15-year civil war fought along religious lines. There are periodic reports of friction between religious groups; however, it frequently is difficult to distinguish between political and religious differences. There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes and edicts of the clerical establishment discourage such activity.

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 4,035 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.6 million. Because the matter of religious balance is such a sensitive political issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932, before the founding of the modern Lebanese State. Consequently there is an absence of accurate data on the relative percentages of the population of the major religions and groups. Most observers believe that Muslims, at approximately 70 percent of the population, make up the majority, but Muslims do not represent a homogenous group. There

also are a variety of other religious groups, primarily Christian denominations, which constitute approximately 23 percent of the population, as well as a small Jewish population. There are also some very small numbers of Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus in the country. There are some atheists in the country.

There are 18 officially recognized religious groups. Their ecclesiastical and demographic patterns are extremely complex. Divisions and rivalries between groups date back as far as 15 centuries, and still are a factor today. The pattern of settlement has changed little since the Seventh century, although there has been a steady numerical decline in the number of Christians compared to Muslims. The main branches of Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. Since the Eleventh century, there has been a sizable Druze presence, concentrated in rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. The smallest Muslim minorities are the Alawites and the Ismaili ("Sevener") Shi'a order. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, and Druze each have state-appointed clerical bodies to administer family and personal status law through their own religious courts, which are subsidized by the State. The Maronites are the largest of the Christian groups. They have had a long and continuous association with the Roman Catholic Church, but have their own patriarch, liturgy, and customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church (composed of ethnic Arabs who maintain a Greek-language liturgy). The remainder of the Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Friends), and Latins (Roman Catholic).

There are a number of foreign missionaries in the country, primarily from Catholic and evangelical Christian churches.

The country's religious pluralism and climate of religious freedom have attracted many persons fleeing alleged religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states. They include Kurds, Shi'a, and Chaldeans from Iraq and Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The State is required to ensure the free exercise of all religious rites with the caveat that public order not be disturbed. The Constitution also provides that the personal status and religious interests of the population be respected. The Government permits recognized religions to exercise authority over matters pertaining to personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. There is no state religion; however, politics are based on the principle of religious representation, which has been applied to every conceivable aspect of public life. The unwritten "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament be a Maronite Christian, a Sunni Muslim, and a Shi'a Muslim, respectively. The Taif Accord, which ended the country's 15-year civil war in 1989, reaffirmed this arrangement but resulted in increased Muslim representation in Parliament and reduced the power of the Maronite President.

A group that seeks official recognition must submit its dogma and moral principles for government review to ensure that such principles do not contradict popular values and the Constitution. The group must ensure that the number of its adherents is sufficient to maintain its continuity.

Alternatively, religious groups may apply to obtain recognition through existing religious groups. Official recognition conveys certain benefits, such as tax-exempt status and the right to apply the religion's codes to personal status matters. An individual may change religions if the head of the religious group the person wishes to join approves of this change.

The Government allows private religious education. The issue of religious education in public schools no longer is the subject of vigorous debate. Muslim and Christian clergy are working together to prepare unified religious educational materials to be used in public schools.

Publishing of religious materials in different languages is permitted.

A number of both Christian and Muslim religious holidays are considered national holidays. The Christian holidays are Christmas, Good Friday, Easter (for both Western and Eastern rites), St. Maroun Day, All Saints Day, Feast of the Assumption, and New Year. The Muslim holidays are Eid al-Adha, the Muslim New Year, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, Eid al-Fitr, and Ashura. The Government also excuses from work public sector employees of the Armenian churches on Armenian Christmas and St. Vartan Day.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by supporting a committee on Islamic-Christian dialog, which is co-chaired by a Muslim and a Christian, and includes representatives of the major religious groups. Leading religious figures who promote Islamic-Christian dialog and ecumenicism are encouraged to visit and are received by government officials at the highest levels.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1989 Taif Accord called for the ultimate abolition of political sectarianism in favor of "expertise and competence." However, little substantive progress has been made in this regard. A "Committee for Abolishing Confessionalism," called for in the Taif Accord, has not yet been formed. One notable exception is the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which, through universal conscription and an emphasis on professionalism, has significantly reduced the role of confessionalism (or religious sectarianism) in that organization. Christians and Muslims are represented equally in the Parliament. Seats in the Parliament and Cabinet, and posts in the civil service, are distributed proportionally among the 18 recognized groups. State recognition is not a legal requirement for religious practice. For example, although Bahá'ís, Buddhists, and Hindus are not recognized officially, they are allowed to practice their faith without government interference; however, they legally may not marry, divorce, or inherit in the country.

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage may be difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups because there are no procedures for civil marriage. However, civil ceremonies performed outside the country are recognized by the State.

The Government does not require citizens' religious affiliations to be indicated on their passports; however, the Government requires that religious affiliation be encoded on national identity cards.

Religious groups administer their own family and personal status laws (see Section II). Many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Although Muslim men may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates that one who "blasphemes God publicly" may face imprisonment for up to a year. In 1999 a leading singer and songwriter was accused of insulting Islam by incorporating lines from a poem based on verses from the Koran into a song; however, he was acquitted of the charges in December 1999. No one was prosecuted under this law during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There was a credible report that Syrian intelligence officials in Lebanon arrested three Syrian Druze men who had converted to Christianity in March 2001 on suspicion of membership in Jehovah's Witnesses. They initially were held in Lebanon and then reportedly were transferred to prison in Syria and held for 2 months. They were released after signing papers stating that they would cease attending their church and cease contact with their pastor.

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

Citizens still are struggling with the legacy of a 15-year civil war fought along religious lines. Some of the harshest fighting of the war occurred within religious groups.

There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes and edicts of the clerical establishment strongly discourage such activity. There were reports that members of the Christian community in Kesirwan with the knowledge of local clergy occasionally harassed verbally church leaders and persons who attend an unrecognized Protestant evangelical church.

The Committee of Islamic-Christian Dialog remains the most significant institution for fostering amicable relations between religious communities.

In October 2001, there was an arson attempt at the St. George Orthodox Church in the overwhelmingly Muslim city of Tripoli. The incident did not result in any injuries or damage to the facility. On October 17, a small explosive package was detonated at the Mar Elias Church in Sidon, another predominantly Muslim city. The

explosion caused minor damage to the church door, but no injuries. Two days later, on October 19, a mosque in the Christian town of Batroun sustained damage in a fire. The incident is believed to have been an arson attack. Political and religious leaders of all religious denominations universally criticized all of the attacks.

On October 3, 1999, one person was killed when a bomb exploded in a Maronite church in an eastern Beirut suburb. There were no arrests made in this case during the period covered by this report.

Throughout the fall of 1999, approximately six random bombings were carried out against Orthodox churches and shops that sold liquor; the bombings took place in the northern city of Tripoli and in surrounding areas. The Government suspected that radical Sunni extremists carried out the bombings in retaliation for Russian military operations in Chechnya. Police officials detained and allegedly tortured a number of Sunni youths for suspected involvement in these bombings; however, the youths were released due to a lack of evidence.

In December 1999, Sunni extremists killed four LAF soldiers in an ambush in the northern region of Dinniyeh after the soldiers attempted to arrest two Sunni Muslims allegedly involved in a series of church bombings. On December 31, 1999, the LAF retaliated by launching a massive military operation against Sunni extremists in the north. Five civilians, 7 LAF soldiers, and 15 extremists were killed in the operation. The trial of the suspects who were involved in the case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In May 2002, some of the suspects went on a hunger strike for a few days to protest trial delays and seek improvements in their detention conditions.

Clerics play a leading role in many ecumenical movements worldwide. For example, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, Aram I, is the moderator for the World Council of Churches. The Imam Musa Sadr Foundation also has played a role in fostering the ecumenical message of Musa Sadr, a Shi'a cleric who disappeared in Libya in 1978.

UNESCO funded a \$10,000 project for the publication of a book on Christian-Islamic understanding in the country. The book was authored by 16 Muslim and Christian scholars and is scheduled to be available on the local market in August 2002.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. policy supports the preservation of pluralism and religious freedom, and the U.S. Embassy advances that goal through contacts at all levels of society, public remarks, embassy public affairs programs, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programming. The issue of political sectarianism remains a delicate one. The United States supports the principles of the Taif Accord and embassy staff regularly discuss the issue of sectarianism with political, religious, and civic leaders. Embassy staff members meet periodically with the leadership—both national and regional—of officially recognized groups, all of whom have a long tradition of meeting with foreign diplomats and discussing issues of general public interest. In late 2001, during Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted a series of iftars (evening meals breaking the daily fast). At one iftar, the Ambassador hosted members of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Committee and others concerned with the issue of religious freedom. The Embassy regularly attends events sponsored by the Committee on Islamic-Christian Dialog. USAID programs in rural areas of the country also require civic participation, often involving villages of different religious backgrounds, with the aim of promoting cooperation between religions.

LIBYA

The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Reports indicate that persons rarely are harassed because of their religious practices unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Information regarding relations among the country's different religious groups is limited.

The U.S. Government has no official presence in the country.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 679,362 square miles, and its population is approximately 5,240,600. The country is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim (97

percent). There are small Christian communities, composed almost exclusively of foreigners. There is a small Anglican community, made up mostly of African immigrant workers in Tripoli, that is part of the Egyptian Diocese; the Anglican Bishop of Libya is resident in Cairo. There are Union churches in Tripoli and Benghazi. There are an estimated 40,000 Roman Catholics who are served by 2 Bishops—1 in Tripoli (serving the Italian community) and 1 in Benghazi (serving the Maltese community). Catholic priests and nuns serve in all the main coastal cities, and there is one priest in the southern city of Sebha. Most of them work in hospitals and with the handicapped; they enjoy good relations with the Government. There are also Coptic and Greek Orthodox priests in both Tripoli and Benghazi.

In 1997 the Vatican established diplomatic relations with the country, stating that the Government had taken steps to protect freedom of religion. Its goal was to address more adequately the needs of the estimated 50,000 Christians in the country.

There still may be a very small number of Jews. Most of the Jewish community, which numbered around 35,000 in 1948, left for Italy at various stages between 1948 and 1967. The Government has been rehabilitating the “medina” (old city) in Tripoli and has renovated the large synagogue there; however, the synagogue has not reopened.

Adherents of other non-Muslim religions, such as Hindus, Baha’is, and Buddhists are present.

There is no information on the number of atheists in the country.

There is no information on the number of foreign missionaries in the country, or whether proselytizing is restricted.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The country’s leadership states publicly its preference for Islam. In an apparent effort to eliminate all alternative power bases, the regime has banned the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order. In its place, Libyan leader Colonel Mu’ammar Al-Qadhafi established the Islamic Call Society (ICS), which is the outlet for state-approved religion, as well as a tool for exporting the revolution abroad. The ICS also is responsible for relations with other religions, including the Christian churches in the country. The ICS’s main purpose is to promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the religious views of the Government, and there are reports that Islamic groups whose beliefs and practices are at variance with the state-approved teaching of Islam are banned. In 1992 the Government announced that the ICS would be disbanded; however, at least some elements of the organization remain operational. Although most Islamic institutions are under government control, prominent families endow some mosques; however, the mosques generally remain within the government-approved interpretation of Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions, and even mosques endowed by prominent families generally remain within the government-approved interpretation of Islam. Reports indicate that individuals rarely are harassed because of their religious practices, unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Members of some minority religions are allowed to conduct services. Christian churches operate openly and are tolerated by the authorities; however, Christians are restricted by the lack of churches and there is a government limit of one church per denomination per city. The Government reportedly has failed to honor a promise made in 1970 to provide the Anglican Church with alternative facilities when it took the property used by the Church. Since 1988 the Anglicans have shared a villa with other Protestant denominations.

There are no known places of worship for other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha’i Faith, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice within the privacy of their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and gatherings.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 1998 at least 150 professionals in Benghazi and several other major cities were arrested on suspicion of political opposition activities, specifically support of or sympathy for the Libyan Islamic Group, an underground Islamic movement that is not known to have used or advocated violence. The Government did not acknowledge the arrest of these individuals until their trial began in March 2001. Proceedings

paused and were continued in September 2001. The accused were denied access to family or choice of legal counsel. The current status of the detainees is unknown.

Some practicing Muslims have shaved their beards to avoid harassment from security services. In the late 1980's, the Government began to pursue a domestic policy directed against Islamic fundamentalists; the Government leadership appears to view fundamentalism as a potential rallying point for opponents of the Government. Qadhafi has criticized publicly Libyan "mujaheddin" (generally, Islamic activists who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan) as threats to the regime.

There continue to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the current regime and advocate the establishment of a more traditional form of Islamic government.

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

Information on religious freedom is limited, although members of minority religions report that they do not face harassment by authorities or the Muslim majority on the basis of their religious practices.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no official presence in the country and maintains no bilateral dialog with the Government on religious freedom issues.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and, although Islam is the official state religion, Jewish and Christian communities openly practice their faiths; however, the Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Since 1999 when King Mohammed VI succeeded his father, King Hassan II, who had ruled for 38 years, the new King has continued to uphold a tradition of respect for interfaith dialog.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity sometimes face social ostracism.

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 land area of approximately 172,320 square miles, and its population is approximately 30,122,350. An estimated 99 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims. The Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 persons and predominantly resides in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas, as well as some smaller cities throughout the country. The foreign Christian community (Roman Catholic and Protestant) consists of 5,000 practicing members, although estimates of Christians residing in the country at any particular time range up to 25,000. Most reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas. Also located in Rabat and Casablanca, the Baha'i community numbers 350 to 400 persons. There is no information regarding the number of atheists in the country.

SECTION II: STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that Islam is the official religion, and designates the King as "Commander of the Faithful" with the responsibility of ensuring "respect for Islam." The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and Jewish and Christian communities openly practice their faiths; however, the Government places cer-

tain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. A small foreign Hindu community has received the right to perform cremations and to hold services. In the past, Baha'is reportedly have been forbidden to meet or participate in communal activities; however, there were no reports that their activities were restricted during the period covered by this report. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

The Government does not license or approve religions or religious organizations. The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the observance of the major religions.

In May 2002, the organization "Al Ghadir" asked for official authorization. This is the first time that an association of Moroccan Shiites has asked for official recognition.

The teaching of Islam in public schools benefits from discretionary funding in the Government's annual education budget. The annual budget also provides funds for religious instruction to the parallel system of Jewish public schools. The Government has funded several efforts to study the cultural, artistic, literary, and scientific heritage of Jewish citizens. In 1998 the Government created a chair for the study of comparative religions including the study of Latin and Hebrew at the University of Rabat. In 2000 the King declared that 100 mosques throughout the country would be used as teaching centers to fight illiteracy. In the first (and pilot) year of the announced program, 10,000 citizens between the ages of 15 and 45 were to receive literacy courses on Islam, civic education, and hygiene. If successful, the program will be expanded to include a larger part of the population in subsequent years. The King designated 200 unemployed university graduates to administer the literacy courses during the program's pilot stages, which began in September 2000. During the period covered by this report, the King proposed increasing the number of teachers and providing vocational training for the teachers.

The Government encourages tolerance and respect among religions. In March 2002, the Government invited Israel to attend the International Parliamentary Union meeting in Marrakech, although there were protests against this decision because of the deteriorating situation in the West Bank. During the King's April 2002 visit to the U.S., he met with prominent Jewish figures and with leaders of the Conference of Presidents of the Major American Jewish Organizations. During this meeting, the King invited participants to visit Morocco. The King's party included several Moroccan Jews, notably Royal Advisor Andre Azoulay, Serge Berdugo, Secretary General of Morocco's Jewish Communities, and Robert Assaraf, President of the World Union of Moroccan Judaism.

Each May the Government organizes the annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which includes musicians from many religions. In the past, the Government has organized numerous symposiums among local and international clergy, priests, rabbis, imams, and other spiritual leaders to examine ways to reduce religious intolerance and to promote interfaith dialog. Each year during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the King hosts colloquiums of Islamic religious scholars that, among other issues, examine ways to promote tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religions.

The King personally ordered an interfaith ceremony to be held at the Catholic cathedral in Rabat in honor of the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. The ceremony, attended by the Prime Minister and most of his cabinet, featured Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious speakers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs monitors Friday mosque sermons and the Koranic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of Islamists but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly close mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controls authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques are constructed using private funds.

The Government bars the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO) as a political party and continued to block the publication of newspapers and the websites of the JCO.

Islamic law and tradition call for punishment of any Muslim who converts to another faith. Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions sometimes face social ostracism, and in the past a small number of persons have faced short periods of questioning or detention by the authorities. Voluntary conversion is not a crime

under the Criminal or Civil Codes; however, until 4 years ago, the authorities had jailed some converts on the basis of references to Islamic law. Christian citizens sometimes still are called in for questioning by the authorities.

Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. According to Article 220 of the Penal Code, any attempt to stop one or more persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs, or attendance at religious services, is unlawful and may be punished by 3 to 6 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$10 to \$50 (115 to 575 dirhams). The Article applies the same penalty to "anyone who employs incitements in order to shake the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion." Foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work quietly. The Government cited the prohibition on conversion in the Penal Code in most cases in which courts expelled foreign missionaries.

Since the time of the French Protectorate (1912–1956), a small foreign Christian community has operated churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without any special restrictions or licensing requirements being imposed. Missionaries who conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations largely are left unhindered; however, those whose activities become public face expulsion. Although no expulsions have occurred since 1998, some missionaries have been called in for questioning by authorities, or have not been granted a "temporary residence permit" enabling them to remain in the country on a longterm basis.

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish, but confiscates Arabic-language Bibles and refuses licenses for their importation and sale, despite the absence of any law banning such books. Nevertheless Arabic Bibles have been sold in local bookstores.

The small Baha'i community has been forbidden to meet or participate in communal activities since 1983; however, there were no reports that the Ministry of the Interior summoned Bahai's for questioning or denied them passports, as had occurred in past years.

There are two sets of laws and courts—one for Jews and one for Muslims—pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters. The family law courts are run, depending on the law that applies, by rabbinical and Islamic authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to those laws. Non-Koranic sections of Muslim law on personal status are applicable to non-Muslim and non-Jewish persons. Alternatively, non-Muslim and non-Jewish foreigners in the country may refer to their embassies or consulates for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other personal issues if they choose not to adhere to Moroccan law.

Women suffer various forms of legal and cultural discrimination, in part because of the codification of Islamic tenets in criminal and civil law. The civil law status of women is governed by the Code of Personal Status (sometimes referred to as the "Moudouwana"), which is based on the Maliki school of Islamic law. Although the Code of Personal Status was reformed in 1993, women's groups still complain of unequal treatment, particularly under the laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance. To marry, a woman generally is required to obtain the permission of her legal guardian, usually her father. Only in rare circumstances may she act in her own behalf as her own guardian. It is far easier for a man to divorce his wife than for a woman to divorce her husband. Under Islamic law and tradition, rather than asking for a divorce, a man simply may repudiate his wife outside of court. Under the 1993 reforms to the Code of Personal Status, a woman's presence in court is required for her husband to divorce her, although women's groups report that this law frequently is ignored. While there are reports that some officials refuse to order a divorce without the wife being present, despite offers of bribes, women's groups complain that men resort to ruses to evade the legal restrictions. The divorce may be finalized even over the woman's objections, although in such cases the court grants her unspecified allowance rights.

A woman seeking a divorce has few practical alternatives. She may offer her husband money to agree to a divorce (known as a *khol'a* divorce). The husband must agree to the divorce and is allowed to specify the amount to be paid, without limit. According to women's groups, many men pressure their wives to pursue this kind of divorce. A woman also may file for a judicial divorce if her husband takes a second wife, if he abandons her, or if he physically abuses her; however, divorce procedures in these cases are lengthy and complicated. In 1998 the Minister of Islamic Affairs proposed additions to the basic marriage contract that would outline the rights and duties agreed upon between husband and wife and permit legal recourse for the enforcement of the contract.

Under the Criminal Code, women generally are accorded the same treatment as men, but this is not the case for family and estate law, which is based on the Code of Personal Status. Under the Code of Personal Status, women inherit only half as much as male heirs. Moreover, even in cases in which the law provides for equal

status, cultural norms often prevent a woman from exercising those rights. For example, when a woman inherits property, male relatives may pressure her to relinquish her interest.

The Government and the King continued to promote their proposal to reform the Personal Status Code to advance women's rights. In March 2001, a new commission on reforming the Personal Status Code was created, and the King publicly urged the commission to work on proposals to improve the application of existing laws and on a longer term "substantial reform" of the code. Islamists and some other traditional segments of society firmly opposed the King's proposal, especially with respect to its more controversial elements, such as reform of women's legal status in marriage and family law issues. A number of women's groups formed a coalition called the "Spring of Equality" to protest the lack of progress in reforming the Personal Status Code. However, no action is likely on the Code before the parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2002.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Islamist dissident Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, who was released in March 2000 from 11 years of house arrest for refusing to acknowledge the religious authority of the King, continued to preside openly over the JCO. Members of the JCO remain subject to constant surveillance.

No action was taken against security forces responsible for the November 2000 killing of 1 person and the injuring of 8 persons while forcibly dispersing a demonstration by an Islamic trade union or for the injuring of more than 100 students during clashes with JCO students at Mohammedia University.

The JCO has an active presence on university campuses and occasionally had organized protests of Sheikh Yassine's house arrest prior to his release. Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that security forces forcibly dispersed JCO protests. However, the Government monitors Islamist campus activities.

Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that JCO members were arrested and jailed or were prevented from gaining access to campgrounds or beaches for prayer sessions.

In September 2001, a Christian missionary was called in for questioning by the authorities. Although the case technically still is open, no further action has been taken.

In 2000 the Gendarmerie Royale summoned several members of the foreign Christian community for questioning concerning the practice of their faith. The Gendarmerie began an investigation into their activities at that time. The investigation reportedly was dropped quietly. Despite not possessing a resident visa, the subjects of the investigation continued to face no problem residing in, exiting, and returning to the country.

In the past, the Ministry of Interior claimed that there were 55 Islamists serving sentences for offenses that ranged from arms smuggling in the 1980's to participation in a bomb attack on a hotel in Marrakech in 1994. In the past, there also were claims that some of these Islamists were imprisoned solely for calling for an Islamic state during the 1980's. The AMDH claims that 2 members of the "Group of 26," an Islamist group involved in smuggling arms into the country from Algeria in the mid-1980's, remain in prison. The other 24 members completed their sentences or otherwise have been released.

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 generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity sometimes face social ostracism. Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, and Jews live throughout the Kingdom in safety. While free expression of Islamic faith and free academic and theological discussion of non-Islamic religions are accepted on television and radio, public efforts to proselytize are discouraged by society. Most citizens view such public acts as provocative threats to law and order in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. In addition society expects public respect for the institutions and mores of Islam, although private behavior and beliefs are unregulated and unmonitored. Because many Muslims view the Baha'i Faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam, most members of the tiny Baha'i community maintain a low religious

profile; however, Baha'is live freely and without fear for their persons or property, and some even hold government jobs.

Because the populace overwhelmingly is Muslim, because Islam is the religion of the State, and because the King enjoys temporal and spiritual authority through his role as "Commander of the Faithful," there is widespread consensus among Muslims about religious practices and interpretation. Other sources of popular consensus are the councils of ulemas, unofficial religious scholars who serve as monitors of the monarchy and the actions of the Government. Because the ulemas traditionally hold the power to legitimize or delegitimize kings through their moral authority, government policies closely adhere to popular and religious expectations. While dissenters such as Sheikh Yassine and his followers challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam, the majority of citizens do not appear to share their views.

The anxiety of Jewish citizens has increased as the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated during 2002. In May 2002, Imam Zamzami, who is affiliated with the Party of Justice and Development (PJD, the officially recognized Islamist party), made openly anti-Semitic remarks. He was criticized severely in the press for not differentiating between Jews who supported Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and those who did not. In early 2002, the police increased the security at synagogues and Jewish community facilities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of the JCO.

U.S. Embassy officials also meet regularly with religious officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Islamic religious scholars, the leader of the Jewish community, and local Christian leaders and missionaries.

OMAN

Islam is the state religion, and the Basic Charter protects the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, provided that such practices do not breach public order. The Basic Charter also provides that Shari'a (Islamic Law) is the basis for legislation. The Government permits worship by non-Muslim residents; however, non-Muslim religious organizations must be registered with the Government, and the Government restricts some of their activities.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Christian and Hindu worship is permitted, and Sultan Qaboos has given land for the construction of centers of worship for these religions. It is illegal for non-Muslims to proselytize Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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's total area is 82,031 square miles, and its population is approximately 2,553,000. Most citizens are Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims, but there also is a minority of Shi'a Muslims. There is a small community of ethnically Indian Hindu citizens and reportedly a very small number of Christian citizens, who came from India or the Levant and who have been naturalized.

The majority of non-Muslims are noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia. There are a number of Christian denominations represented in the country.

There is no information available regarding the number of atheists in the country.

While there is no information regarding missionary groups in the country, several non-proselytizing faithbased organizations reportedly operate. Clergy of the Anglican Church, the Reformed Church of America, and other Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Islam is the state religion, which is affirmed by the 1996 Basic Charter. The 1996 Basic Charter provides that Shari'a is the basis for legislation and preserves the

freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, provided that such practice does not breach public order. Within these parameters, the Government permits freedom of worship for non-Muslims. The Charter also provides that discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or religious group is prohibited. Some non-Muslims worship at churches and temples built on land donated by the Sultan, including two Catholic and two Protestant churches. Hindu temples also have been built on government-provided land. In addition the Government provided land for Catholic and Protestant missions in Sohar and Salalah. Non-Muslim religious organizations must be registered with the Government, and the Government restricts some of their activities.

Citizen children must attend a school that provides instruction in Islam; noncitizen children may attend schools that do not offer instruction in Islam.

The Government has sponsored forums at which differing interpretations of Islam have been examined. During the period covered by this report, the Government sponsored a seminar on the tolerant nature of Islam as practiced in the country and on promoting interfaith and intercultural dialog.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Citizens and noncitizen residents are free to discuss their religious beliefs; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Under Islamic law, a Muslim who recants belief in Islam would be considered an apostate and dealt with under applicable Islamic legal procedure. Non-Muslims are permitted to change their religious affiliation to Islam. The authorities reportedly have asked members of the Baha'i community not to proselytize, in accordance with the country's law and custom. There was one case in which an anonymous and apparently unfounded accusation of proselytizing led to the revocation of the residence permit of a longterm foreign national resident, despite attempts to address the accusations against him.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim groups from publishing religious material, although material printed abroad may be brought into the country. Members of all religions and religious groups are free to maintain links with coreligionists abroad and to undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. Ministers and priests from abroad also are permitted to visit the country for the purpose of carrying out duties related to registered religious organizations.

The police monitor sermons at mosques to ensure that the imams do not discuss political topics and stay within the state-approved orthodoxy of Islam. The Government expects all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Some aspects of Islamic law and tradition as interpreted in the country discriminate against women. Shari'a favors male heirs in adjudicating inheritance claims. While there is continuing reluctance to take an inheritance dispute to court for fear of alienating the family, women increasingly are aware of and taking steps to protect and exercise their rights as citizens.

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 generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious discrimination in the private sector largely is absent. In the past, some members of the Shi'a minority claimed that they faced discrimination in employment and educational opportunities.

Christian theologians have met with local Islamic authorities and with members of the faculty at the country's major university. Private groups that promote interfaith dialog are permitted to exist as long as discussions do not constitute an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs.

In May 2001, the Sultan invited Islamic leaders from many countries and all major branches and schools of Islam to the opening of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

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. Members of the staff at the U.S. Embassy routinely participate in local religious ceremonies and

have contact with members of non-Muslim religious groups. At the request of embassy officers, the Office of the Grand Mufti met publicly with members of the diplomatic community and others to reiterate the tolerant nature of Islam as practiced in the country and to promote interfaith and intercultural dialog.

QATAR

The Constitution provides no explicit protection for freedom of religion and the Government continues to prohibit public worship by non-Muslims; however, it permits private religious services by people of the book (Christians and Jews). The official state religion follows the conservative Wahhabi tradition of the Hanbali school of Islam.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report due to the Government's action in allowing more visibility for the Christian community and by announcing its intention to organize a conference bringing together representatives of Islam, Christianity and other religions in order to promote dialog among religions. Non-Muslims may not proselytize, and the Government formally prohibits the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious books and materials. However, in practice, individuals generally are not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. There are no Shi'a employed in senior national security positions.

There are generally amicable relations among persons of differing religious beliefs; however, many Muslims oppose the construction of permanent Christian churches.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials meet regularly with government officials to discuss issues of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 4,254 square miles and its population is estimated at approximately 650,000 persons, of whom approximately 170,000 are believed to be citizens. The majority of the 480,000 non-citizens are Sunni Muslims, mostly from other Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts, and their accompanying family members. The remaining foreigners include Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Ras Laffan/Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

The Christian community is a diverse mix of Indians, Filipinos, Europeans, Arabs, and Americans. It includes Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and other Protestant denominations. The Hindu community is almost exclusively Indian, while Buddhists include South and East Asians. Most Baha'is come from Iran. Both citizens and foreigners attend a small number of Shi'a mosques.

There is no information regarding the number of atheists in the country.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no constitutional protection for freedom of religion, and the Government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims; however, it does permit private services. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch. While Shi'a practice most aspects of their faith freely, they may not organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies or perform rites such as self flagellation.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Minister of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, the administration of clerical affairs, and Islamic education. The Amir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods, and personally finances the Hajj journeys of poor pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

The Government officially celebrates Eid Al-Fitr, following the holy month of Ramadan, and Eid Al-Adha, which commemorates Abraham's sacrifice, as well as the country's Independence day.

The Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches received de facto official recognition in the latter part of 1999, when the Government made a verbal commitment

to allow the churches to operate without interference. The Government has respected this commitment in practice, but it still had not granted these churches formal recognition by the end of the period covered by this report. The Government does not recognize any other religions, officially or unofficially. During the period covered by the report, Christian church officials continued to press the Government for authorization to construct churches on land reserved by the Government for the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox communities; however, the Government has not issued building permits. The Government does not maintain an official approved register of religious congregations. In the past, the Government has raised concerns that a rapid pace of progress may provoke opposition among more conservative critics.

During the period covered by this report, the Papal Nuncio from Kuwait, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury and his accompanying delegation, visited the country and met the Amir. In March 2002, the Government sponsored a conference on democracy and development, in which the topic of Muslim-Christian dialog was featured prominently and in which a representative of the Faculty of Shari'a at Qatar University participated. In May the Qatar International Christian Ministries—an umbrella group comprised of seven Christian churches—sponsored a Christian Gospel music concert which brought together an unprecedented number of spectators (1,300) in a public space (a major cinema). In June 2002, the Amir met with the Cardinal Glemp of Warsaw, Chairman of the Council of Polish Bishops, and later announced in Arabic on the Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel that the Government intended to organize a religious conference bringing together representatives of Islam, Christianity, and other religions in order to promote dialog among religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no constitutional protection for freedom of religion, and the government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims; however, it does permit and protect private religious services. Nevertheless, the lack of formal government recognition limits the ability of non-Muslim religious organizations to obtain trade licenses, sponsor clergy, or to open bank accounts in the name of the denomination.

Non-Muslims may not proselytize, and the Government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims. However, it does permit and protect private services. Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy, and is technically a capital offense; however, there is no record of an execution for such a crime since 1971.

Congregations coordinate the holding of large religious services with the Government in advance, while smaller services are held without prior authorization. Although traffic police may direct cars at these services, the congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, can draw more than 1,300 worshippers.

The Government does not permit Hindus, Buddhists, Bah'ais or members of other religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations. (The Koran specifically enjoins toleration only for Christians and Jews.) However, there is no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these faiths in the private practice of their religion.

Discrimination in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services do occur, but nationality is usually a more important determinant than religion. For example, Muslims hold nearly all highranking government positions because they are reserved for citizens. However, while Shi'a are well represented in the bureaucracy and business community, there are no Shi'as employed in senior national security positions.

The Government formally prohibits the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature; however, in practice individuals generally are not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. In previous years, there were sporadic reports of confiscation of such materials by customs officials; however, during the period covered by this report, Christian worship groups reported having no trouble importing religious instructional materials (e.g., Sunday school materials and devotionals) for their use. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter now are available readily in local shops.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there are no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attend secular private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases. Convicted Muslims may earn points for good behavior and have their sentences reduced by a few months by memorizing the Koran.

Shari'a law and local tradition impose significant restrictions on Muslim women. These restrictions do not apply to noncitizen women. For example, a woman is prohibited from applying for a driver's license unless she has permission from a male guardian. The Government adheres to Shari'a as practiced in the country in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. However, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. In cases of divorce, Shari'a is followed; younger children remain with the mother and older children with the father. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation. However, local authorities do not allow a noncitizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings but generally are represented by a male relative; however, women may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

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 persons of differing religious beliefs generally are amicable and tolerant; however, a sizable percentage of the citizen population opposes the construction of permanent Christian churches.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers regularly meet with government officials at all levels to address religious freedom issues. The Embassy coordinates with other embassies to increase the impact of its initiatives. Embassy officers also facilitate contacts between leaders of the religious communities and government officials to advance progress on specific initiatives involving freedom of religion.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic monarchy without legal protection for freedom of religion, and such protection does not exist in practice. Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government prohibits the public practice of non-Muslim religions. The Government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private; however, it does not always respect this right in practice.

There generally was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to detain Shi'a religious leaders and members of the Ismaili Shi'a community in Najran province. Freedom of non-Muslims to worship privately has received increasing attention in recent years through published interviews with government officials and press articles that addressed the subject in the context of human rights; however, the right to private worship remains restricted. The Government has stated publicly that its policy is to protect the right of non-Muslims to worship privately; however, it does not provide explicit guidelines for determining what constitutes private worship, which makes distinctions between public and private worship unclear. Such lack of clarity, as well as instances of arbitrary enforcement by the authorities, force most non-Muslims to worship in such a manner as to avoid discovery by the Government or others. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face institutionalized political and economic discrimination, including restrictions on the practice of their faith.

An overwhelming majority of citizens support an Islamic state and oppose public non-Muslim worship. There is societal discrimination against adherents of the Shi'a minority.

Senior U.S. government officials raised the issue of religious freedom with the Government on numerous occasions during the period covered by this report.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total land area is 5,273,965 square miles and its population is approximately 17 million, with an estimated foreign population of 7 million. The foreign population includes approximately 1.5 million Indians, 1 million Bangladeshis, nearly 900,000 Pakistanis, 800,000 Egyptians, 800,000 Filipinos, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 130,000 Sri Lankans, 40,000 Eritreans, and 36,000 Americans. Comprehensive statistics for the denominations of foreigners are not available, but they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. For example, the Embassy of the Philippines reports that over 90 percent of the Filipino community is Christian. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates there are well over 500,000 Catholics in the country, and perhaps as many as 1 million. There is no information regarding the number of atheists in the country.

The majority of Saudi citizens are Sunni Muslims predominantly adhering to the strict interpretation of Islam taught by the Salafi or Wahhabi school that is the official state religion.

Approximately 1 million citizens are Shi'a Muslims, who live mostly in the eastern province, where they constitute approximately one-third of the population.

There is no information regarding foreign missionaries in the country. Proselytizing is not permitted.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government prohibits the public practice of other religions. The Government recognizes the right of private worship by non-Muslims; however, it does not always respect this right in practice. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic monarchy and the Government has declared the Holy Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad to be the country's Constitution. The Government bases its legitimacy on governance according to the precepts of the rigorously conservative and strict interpretation of the Salafi or Wahhabi school of the Sunni branch of Islam and discriminates against other branches of Islam. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concepts of separation of religion and state, and such separation does not exist.

The legal system is based on Shari'a (Islamic law), with Shari'a courts basing their judgments largely on a code derived from the Holy Koran and the Sunna. The Government permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own legal tradition to adjudicate noncriminal cases within their community.

The only national holidays observed in Saudi Arabia are the two Eids, Eid Al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha at the conclusion of the Hajj. Observance of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura is allowed in the eastern city of Qatif and in the southern province of Naran.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Islamic practice generally is limited to that of a school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, an 18th century Arab religious reformer. (Outside Saudi Arabia, this branch of Islam is often referred to as "Wahhabi," a term the Saudis do not use. The teachings of the reformer Abd Al-Wahhab are more often referred to by adherents as "Salafi" or "Muwahiddun," that is, following the forefathers of Islam, or unifiers of Islamic practice.) Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are discouraged. The spreading of Muslim teachings not in conformance with the officially accepted interpretation of Islam is prohibited. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticize this interpretation, including both those who advocate a stricter interpretation and those who favor a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, reportedly have been imprisoned and faced other reprisals.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of almost all mosques in the country, although over 30 percent of all mosques in Saudi Arabia are built and endowed by private persons. The Ministry pays the salaries of imams (prayer leaders) and others who work in the mosques. A governmental committee defines the qualifications of imams. The Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice (commonly called "religious police" or Mutawwa'in) is a government entity, and its chairman has ministerial status.

Foreign imams are barred from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times and prohibited from delivering sermons during Friday congregational

prayers. The Government states that its actions are part of its “Saudiization” plan to replace foreign workers with citizens.

Under Shari’a conversion by a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused does not recant. There were no executions for apostasy during the period covered by this report, and there have been no reports of such executions for the past several years.

The Government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture for engaging in overt religious activity that attracts official attention. The Government has stated publicly, including before the U.N. Committee on Human Rights in Geneva, that its policy is to protect the right of non-Muslims to worship privately; however, it does not provide explicit guidelines—such as the number of persons permitted to attend and acceptable locations—for determining what constitutes private worship, which makes distinctions between public and private worship unclear. Such lack of clarity, as well as instances of arbitrary enforcement by the authorities, force most non-Muslims to worship in such a manner as to avoid discovery by the Government or others. Those detained for non-Muslim worship almost always are deported by authorities after sometimes lengthy periods of arrest during investigation. In some cases, they also are sentenced to receive lashes prior to deportation.

The Government does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country for the purpose of conducting religious services, although some come under other auspices and perform religious functions in secret. Such restrictions make it very difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergymen and attend services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, particularly are affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, is illegal. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risk confrontation with the Mutawwa’in. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, approximately 50 so-called “Call and Guidance” centers employing approximately 500 persons work to convert foreigners to Islam. Some non-Muslim foreigners convert to Islam during their stay in the country. According to official reports, 942 foreign workers converted to Islam in the past year. The press often carries articles about such conversions, including testimonials. The press as well as government officials publicized the conversion of the Italian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia in late 2001.

The Government requires noncitizens to carry Iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contain a religious designation for “Muslim” or “non-Muslim.”

Members of the Shi’a minority are the subjects of officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination. The authorities permit the celebration of the Shi’a holiday of Ashura in the eastern province city of Qatif, provided that the celebrants do not undertake large, public marches or engage in self-flagellation (a traditional Shi’a practice). The celebrations are monitored by the police. In 2002 observance of Ashura took place without incident in Qatif. No other Ashura celebrations are permitted in the country, and many Shi’a travel to Qatif or to Bahrain to participate in Ashura celebrations. The Government continued to enforce other restrictions on the Shi’a community, such as banning Shi’a books.

Shi’a have declined government offers to build state-supported mosques because they fear the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi’a motifs in any such mosques. The Government seldom permits private construction of Shi’a mosques. In March 2001, religious police reportedly closed a Shi’a mosque in Hofuf because it had been built without government permission.

Members of the Shi’a minority are discriminated against in government employment, especially with respect to positions that relate to national security, such as in the military or in the Ministry of the Interior. The Government restricts employment of Shi’a in the oil and petrochemical industries. The Government also discriminates against Shi’a in higher education through unofficial restrictions on the number of Shi’a admitted to universities.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution some Shi’a suspected of subversion have been subjected periodically to surveillance and limitations on travel abroad. Prior to 2001, the Government actively discouraged Shi’a travel to Iran to visit pilgrimage sites due to security concerns. Shi’a who went to Iran without government permission, or who were suspected of such travel, normally had their passports confiscated upon their return for periods of up to 2 years. However, according to press reports, in early 2001, the Government lifted the requirement that citizens intending to travel to Iran seek permission in advance from authorities. This change corresponded with improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The effect has been to allow Shi’a citizens to travel freely to Iran for religious pilgrimages. Advance permission

for travel to Iraq, whether for business or religious pilgrimage, has been necessary for some time due to security concerns, but such travel remains possible.

Under the provisions of Shari'a law as practiced in the country, judges may discount the testimony of people who are not practicing Muslims or who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. Legal sources report that testimony by Shi'a is often ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis. For example, in May 2001, a judge in the eastern province ruled that the testimony of two Shi'a witnesses to an automobile accident was inadmissible. Sentencing under the legal system is not uniform. Laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally; however, under Shari'a as interpreted and applied in the country, crimes against Muslims may result in harsher penalties than those against non-Muslims. Observers believe that the new Criminal Procedure Law, passed in late 2001 and became effective on May 1, 2002, should give fairer treatment to all defendants.

Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including non-Muslim materials, such as Bibles and religious videotapes. Such materials are subject to confiscation, although rules appear to be applied arbitrarily.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools at all levels. All public school children receive religious instruction that conforms with the official version of Islam. Non-Muslim students in private schools are not required to study Islam. No private religious schools are permitted for non-Muslims.

Women are subject to discrimination under Shari'a as interpreted in the country. In a Shari'a court, a woman's testimony does not carry the same weight as that of a man: the testimony of one man equals that of two women. Female parties to court proceedings, such as divorce and other family law cases, generally must deputize male relatives to speak on their behalf.

Islamic law permits polygyny, with one man allowed to have a maximum of four wives at one time. While polygyny is becoming less prevalent among some segments of the population due to demographic and economic changes, the practice is still common. Islamic law enjoins a man to treat each wife equally. In practice such equality is left to the discretion of the husband. Women may not marry noncitizens without government permission; men must obtain approval from the Ministry of Interior to marry women from countries outside the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In accordance with Shari'a, women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims; men may marry Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims.

While Shari'a provides women with a basis to own and dispose of property independently, women often are constrained from asserting such rights because of various legal and societal barriers, especially regarding employment and freedom of movement. In addition, daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers.

Women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce, but men may divorce without cause. In doing so, men are required to pay immediately an amount of money agreed upon at the time of the marriage, which serves as a one-time alimony payment. Women who demonstrate legal grounds for divorce still are entitled to this alimony. If divorced or widowed, a Muslim woman normally may keep her children until they attain a specified age: 7 years for boys, 9 years for girls. Children over these ages are awarded to the former husband or the deceased husband's family. Numerous divorced foreign women continued to be prevented by their former husbands from visiting their children after divorce.

Failure of Muslim women to wear an abaya or headscarf can lead to admonishment (and in the past occasionally has led to arrest) by some Mutawwa'in enforcing their own interpretation of religious doctrine.

Abuses of Freedom of Religion

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom. However, reports of abuses are often difficult or impossible to corroborate for a variety of reasons. First, the fear and consequent secrecy surrounding any non-Muslim religious activity contribute to reluctance to disclose any information that might lead to more harm of persons under investigation by the Government. Moreover, information regarding government practices is incomplete because judicial proceedings have been closed to the public, although the new Criminal Procedural Law that became effective in May 2002 allows some court proceedings to be open to the public.

The Government restricts freedom of speech and association, and the media exercises self-censorship regarding sensitive issues such as religious freedom. There are no independent nongovernmental organizations that monitor religious freedom. However, the Government has stated publicly that it would welcome foreign human

rights organizations to conduct independent investigations, although there were no such visits during the period covered by this report.

The Government continued to commit abuses against members of the Shi'a minority. Since beginning the investigation of the 1996 bombing of the U.S. military installation at Al-Khobar, in which a number of eastern province Shi'a were arrested, authorities have detained, interrogated, and confiscated the passports of a number of Shi'a Muslims. The Government reportedly continued to detain an unknown number of Shi'a who were arrested in the aftermath of the Al-Khobar bombing. Government security forces reportedly arrest Shi'a based on the smallest suspicion, hold them in custody for lengthy periods, and then release them without explanation.

According to various reports, a number of Shi'a sheikhs (religious leaders) remained in detention during the period covered by this report. Amnesty International (AI) reported that Sheikh Ali bin Ali al-Ghanim was arrested in August 2000 at the border with Jordan and held by the Mabahith, the national investigative bureau that is part of the Ministry of Interior. In March 2001, Mabahith officers reportedly arrested and detained Sheikh Mohammed Al Amri in Medina. In January 2002, Sheikh Ahmed Turki al-Saab was arrested 1 week after the U.S. newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* published his comments that were critical of the Government. On April 23, he was sentenced to flogging and 7 years in prison.

Early in 2000, a Shi'a sheikh was taken into custody and three other sheikhs were arrested for unknown reasons near the border with Jordan. According to AI, Hashim Al-Sayyid Al-Sada, a Shi'a cleric suspected of political or religious dissent, was arrested in his home in April 2000 and reportedly remained held incommunicado.

In April 2000, in the city of Najran in the southwestern province bordering Yemen, rioting by members of the Makarama Ismaili Shi'a eventually led to an attack by an armed group of Shi'a on a hotel that contained an office of the regional governor. Security forces responded, leading to extended gun battles between the two sides. Some press reports indicated that the rioting followed the arrest of a Makarama Ismaili Shi'a imam and some of his followers on charges of "sorcery." Various other reports attributed the unrest to the closure of two Ismaili Shi'a mosques and the provincial governor's refusal to permit Ismailis to hold public observances of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura. Still other reports attributed the unrest to a local crackdown on smuggling and resultant tribal discontent. Officials at the highest level of the Government stated that the unrest in Najran was not the result of Shi'a-Sunni tension or religious discrimination. After the unrest ended the Government stated that 5 members of the security forces were killed, and Ismaili leaders claimed that as many as 40 Ismaili tribesmen were killed. There was no independent confirmation of these claims. In November 2001 and again in January 2002, the authorities in Najran arrested at least six more Ismailis. They were charged with practicing sorcery and continued to be detained at the end of the period covered by this report. The November and January arrests were in addition to the 93 Ismailis, including several Ismaili leaders, who have been detained since the April 2000 incident.

In October 2000, AI reported that two Ismaili Shi'a teachers, who were arrested in April 2000 following the unrest, were convicted on charges of sorcery and sentenced to 1,500 lashes; however, this report could not be confirmed. In May 2001, independent sources in Najran reported that the Government had during the year since the riot removed dozens of natives of Najran from government jobs in the region to work elsewhere in the country.

The Government continued to detain non-Muslims engaged in worship services. Between June and August 2001 in Jeddah, 14 Christians were arrested and imprisoned for months, reportedly on charges of conducting public worship services and attempting to proselytize. Early in 2002, 11 of the detainees were deported and, in March 2002, the remaining 3 Christians, 2 Ethiopians and 1 Filipino, were deported. Prior to their release, they claimed in a publicly and internationally circulated e-mail letter that some of them had been tortured by the authorities while in prison.

In early 2002 in the eastern city of Abqaiq, 2 Filipino Christian residents were arrested and imprisoned in Dammam for conducting a Roman Catholic prayer group in their home. In April 2002, the 2 Filipinos were sentenced to 150 lashes and deportation following a 30-day jail sentence, allegedly for their religious beliefs. They were deported in late May 2002.

In April 2002, Saudi police and Mutawwa'in detained a total of 26 Christians in successive raids on 2 private houses where worship services were being held in a residential area of downtown Riyadh. One of those originally arrested later reported that after 2 days, 23 of the Christians were released, but that 3, 1 Sudanese and 2 Sri Lankans, were kept in detention and moved to another Riyadh prison. Their

Saudi sponsors believe that the three men probably will be deported following a trial. Following these raids, the authorities returned to one of the private houses and confiscated chairs, Bibles, musical instruments, a microphone, and curtains that they ripped from the walls.

In May 2002, Saudi police and Mutawwa'in detained a total of 11 Christians, including foreign nationals from both Ethiopia and Eritrea, then living in the Jeddah area at the end of the period covered by this report. They allegedly had been engaged in activities that violated restrictions against public worship. Of the 11, 3 had been deported and 8 remained in prison.

There were reports during the period covered by this report that authorities interrogated members of the tiny Baha'i community regarding the size and status of their community, although there were no reports of any additional actions taken against them.

Magic is widely believed in and sometimes practiced, often in the form of fortune-telling and swindles; however, under Shari'a, the practice of magic is regarded as the worst form of polytheism, an offense for which no repentance is accepted and which is punishable by death. There are an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," including the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." In a few cases, self-proclaimed "miracle workers" have been executed for sorcery involving physical harm or apostasy.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country. While reports of incidents were most numerous in the central Nejd region, which includes the capital Riyadh, reports of incidents in the eastern province increased during the period covered by this report. In certain areas, both the Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government requires the Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in do not always comply with the requirements. The Government has not criticized abuses by the Mutawwa'in directly, but criticism of the group has appeared in the largely government-controlled English-language press. The Government has sought to curtail these abuses; however, the abuses continue.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress and dispersing gatherings in public places. Mutawwa'in frequently reproached citizen and foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes, and detained men and women found together who were not married or closely related.

The Mutawwa'in have the authority to detain persons for no more than 24 hours for violation of strict standards of proper dress and behavior; however, they sometimes exceeded this limit before delivering detainees to the police. Procedures require a police officer to accompany the Mutawwa'in at the time of arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement. According to reports, the Mutawwa'in also are no longer permitted to detain citizens for more than a few hours, may not conduct investigations, and may no longer allow unpaid volunteers to accompany official patrols.

Forced Religious Conversion

Under the law, children of Saudi fathers are considered Muslim, regardless of the county or the religious tradition in which they may have been raised. In some cases, children raised in other countries and in other religious traditions who came to Saudi Arabia or who were taken by their Saudi fathers to Saudi Arabia reportedly were coerced to conform to Islamic norms and practices, although forcible conversion is prohibited. 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 during the period covered by this report, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. However, there was a report that prior to the period covered by this report, at least one U.S. citizen child in the country was subjected to pressure—and at times force—by her Saudi relatives to renounce Christianity and conform to Islamic norms and practices. The child has since returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There is societal discrimination against members of the Shi'a minority; however, improved relations between Iran (a predominately Shi'a nation) and Saudi Arabia in the period covered by this report continued to improve the climate of Sunni-Shi'a relations in the country. The overwhelming majority of citizens support an Islamic

state and oppose public non-Muslim worship. They believe this stance conforms with a teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. The official title of the head of state is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," and the role of the King and the Government in upholding Islam in the country is regarded as a paramount function throughout the Muslim world.

Many non-Muslims who undertook religious observances privately and discreetly during the period covered by this report were not disturbed; however, problems occurred after some citizens complained to the authorities about services by their neighbors. Some non-Muslims claim that informants paid by the Mutawwa'in infiltrate their private worship groups. Employers claim that contracts of non-Muslim employees were not renewed because of performance problems or efforts to increase employment opportunities for Saudi workers.

Relations between Saudi Muslims and foreign Muslims are generally good. Each year the country welcomes approximately 2 million Muslim pilgrims from all over the world and of all branches of Islam, who visit the country during a 2-week period to perform the Hajj. Foreign Muslims of all denominations may pray freely in mosques as long as they follow Saudi Sunni prayer practices, although foreign imams have a more difficult time obtaining employment in mosques than their Saudi counterparts.

In certain areas, religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the Government and acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Senior U.S. government officials on numerous occasions during the period covered by this report raised the issue of religious freedom with government officials and sought reconfirmation of the Government's commitment to permit private non-Muslim worship. In December 2001, U.S. embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials to deliver and discuss the U.S. Government's 2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. In May 2002, senior U.S. embassy officers met again with MFA officials to protest the detention of Christians arrested in the Eastern Province and the detention of Christian worshipers in Riyadh. In addition embassy officers met with MFA officials at various other times during the year on matters pertaining to religious freedom.

SYRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes restrictions in some areas.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government monitors the activities of all groups, including religious groups, discourages aggressive proselytizing, and has banned Jehovah's Witnesses as a politically motivated Zionist organization.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, there were periodic reports of friction between religious faiths.

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 71,498 square miles, and its population is approximately 17 million. Sunni Muslims represent approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Druze, Alawi, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Yazidis, constitute an estimated 16 percent of the population (approximately 2.7 million persons). A variety of Christian denominations make up the remaining 10 percent of the population (approximately 1.7 million persons). The great majority of Christians belong to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belong to autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There also are believed to be approximately 85 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for various religious denominations due to government sensitivity to sectarian demographics.

The largest Christian denomination is the Greek Orthodox Church, known in Syria as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The Syrian

Orthodox Church is notable for its use of a Syriac liturgy. Most Syrians of Armenian origin belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate denominations include the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nestorian Church. The Government also permits the presence, both officially and unofficially, of other Christian denominations, including Baptist, Mennonite, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

Sunni Muslims are present throughout the country. Christians tend to be urbanized and most live in Damascus and Aleppo, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. A majority of the Alawis live in the Latakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resides in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yazidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups are present but operate discreetly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes restrictions in some areas. The only advantage given to a particular religion by the Constitution is the requirement that the President be a Muslim. There is no official state religion, although the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

All religions and orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all meetings by religious (and non-religious) groups, except for worship. Recognized religious groups receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes and personal property taxes on official vehicles.

There is a strict de facto separation of church and state. Religious groups tend to avoid any involvement in internal political affairs. The Government, in turn, generally refrains from becoming involved in strictly religious issues, including direct support for programs promoting interfaith understanding. Nevertheless, government policies tend to support the study and practice of moderate forms of Islam.

The Government generally does not prohibit links by its citizens with coreligionists in other countries or with a supranational hierarchy. In May 2001, Pope John Paul II visited the country and conducted a public Mass in Damascus, which representatives of all of the country's Orthodox and Uniate Christian denominations attended. The Government also allowed the Pope to tour the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, which was the first time in history that a Pontiff visited a mosque. At a ceremony welcoming the Pope to the country, President Bashar al-Asad gave a speech that was denounced widely as anti-Semitic (see Section IV).

All schools officially are government-run and nonsectarian, although some schools are run in practice by Christian and Jewish minorities. There is mandatory religious instruction in schools, with government-approved teachers and curricula. Religion courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Jews have a separate primary school, which offers religious instruction on Judaism, in addition to traditional subjects. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the Government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic) and Chaldean in some schools on the basis that these are "liturgical languages."

Both Orthodox and Western Easter and three Muslim religious holidays (Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the Prophet Mohammed's birthday) are recognized as national holidays.

Religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws on marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 1964 the Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses as a politically motivated Zionist organization. However, Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to practice their faith privately despite the official ban.

Although the law does not prohibit proselytizing, the Government discourages such activity in practice, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups.

The security services constantly are alert to any possible political threat to the State and all groups, religious and non-religious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government considers militant Islam in particular a threat to the regime and follows closely the practice of its ad-

herents. The Government has allowed many mosques to be built; however, sermons are monitored and controlled and mosques are closed between prayers.

The Government primarily cites political rather than religious reasons for barring Jews from government employment and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews also are the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards note their religion.

Government policy officially disavows sectarianism of any kind. However, in the case of the President's Alawi Muslim group, religion can be a contributing factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis hold a predominant position in the security services and military, well out of proportion to their percentage of the population.

For Muslims personal status law on divorce is based on Shari'a (Islamic law), and some of its provisions as interpreted discriminate against women. For example, husbands may claim adultery as grounds for divorce, but wives face more difficulty in presenting the same case. If a woman requests a divorce from her husband, she may not be entitled to child-support in some instances. In addition under the law a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach age 9 and her daughters at age 12. Inheritance for Muslims also is based on Shari'a. Accordingly Muslim women usually are granted half of the inheritance share of male heirs. However, Shari'a mandates that male heirs provide financial support to the female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother who inherits an unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate is obligated to provide for the sister's well-being. If the brother fails to do so, she has the right to sue. Polygyny is legal but is practiced only by a small minority of Muslim men.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were credible reports of large-scale arrests of Syrian and Palestinian Islamists affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Liberation Party in late 1999 and early 2000. Some of the Islamist prisoners reportedly were tortured in detention. These arrests were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability. In November 1999, the Government declared an amnesty for 600 political prisoners and detainees and a general pardon for some nonpolitical prisoners. There were credible reports that several hundred Islamists were among those political prisoners who benefited from the amnesty. Presidential amnesties issued in November 2000 and December 2001 reportedly freed hundreds of oppositionist political prisoners, including many members of the Muslim Brotherhood, although it is believed that some remain in custody.

There was a credible report that three Syrian Druze men who had converted to Christianity were arrested in March 2001 by Syrian intelligence officials in Lebanon, possibly on suspicion of membership in Jehovah's Witnesses. They reportedly were transferred to prison in Syria, held for 2 months, and then released after signing papers stating that they would cease attending their church and cease contact with their pastor.

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 among the various religious communities generally are amicable, and there is little evidence of societal discrimination or violence against religious minorities. The Syrian press, which the Government tightly controls, occasionally publishes anti-Semitic articles that contribute to antagonism towards Jews. There were periodic reports of friction between religious faiths, which may be related to deteriorating economic conditions and internal political issues. Specifically, there were reports of minor incidents of harassment and property damage against Jews in Damascus. These incidents are believed to be in reaction to Israeli actions against Palestinians. On October 12, 2000, a group of Palestinians threw bricks, stones, and Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Damascus, apparently in reaction to the Israeli Government's use of force against Palestinians in the occupied territories. No one was injured in the attack; however, the synagogue was damaged slightly and closed for approximately 1 month. The Government took immediate steps to ensure that the Jewish community would be protected from further attacks.

Although no law prohibits religious denominations from proselytizing, the Government is sensitive to complaints by religious groups of aggressive proselytizing by other groups and has intervened when such activities threatened the relations among religions (see Section II). Societal conventions make conversions relatively

rare, especially in the case of Muslim-to-Christian conversions. In many cases, societal pressure forces those who undertake such conversions to relocate within the country or to leave the country in order to practice their new religion openly.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials meet routinely with religious leaders and adherents of almost all denominations at the national, regional, and local levels. In May 2001, the State Department spokesman criticized as unacceptable and regrettable President Asad's speech during the Pope's visit, in which he characterized Jews as the betrayers of Christ and the Prophet Mohammed (see Section II).

The Embassy funded two programs to promote religious freedom and tolerance during the period covered by this report. Embassy officials remained sensitive to any change in the degree of religious freedom in the country.

TUNISIA

Islam is the state religion. The Constitution provides for the free exercise of other religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally observes and enforces this right; however, there were some restrictions and abuses.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, prohibits proselytizing, and partially limits the religious freedom of members of the Baha'i faith.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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 63,170 square miles and its population is 9.6 million. The vast majority of the population is nominally Muslim. There is no reliable data on the number of practicing Muslims. There is a small indigenous Sufi Muslim community; however, there are no statistics regarding its size. Reliable sources report that many Sufis left the country shortly after independence when their religious buildings and land reverted to the Government (as did those of Orthodox Islamic foundations), leaving them no place to worship. Although the Sufi community is small, its tradition of mysticism permeates the practice of Islam throughout the country. During annual Ramadan festivals, Sufis provide public cultural entertainment with whirling dervish dances.

The nominal Christian community—composed of foreign temporary and permanent residents and a small group of native-born citizens of both European and Arab origin—numbers approximately 20,000 and is dispersed throughout the country. According to church leaders, the practicing Christian population is approximately 1,000 and includes an estimated 200 native-born ethnic Arab citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Catholic Church operates seven churches, six private schools, and six cultural centers/libraries throughout the country, as well as one hospital in Tunis, the capital. It has approximately 400 practicing members, composed of temporary and permanent foreign residents and a small number of native-born citizens of European and Arab origin. In addition to holding religious services, the Catholic Church also freely organizes cultural activities and performs charitable work throughout the country. The Russian Orthodox Church has 100 practicing members and operates 2 churches—1 in Tunis and 1 in Bizerte. The French Reform Church operates 1 church in Tunis, with a congregation of 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church has approximately 50 foreign members who worship in a church in Tunis. The 30-member Greek Orthodox Church maintains 1 church each in Tunis, Sousse, and Jerba. There are also 50 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, of which about half are foreign residents and half are native-born citizens.

With 1,800 adherents split nearly equally between the capital and the island of Jerba, the Jewish community is the country's largest indigenous religious minority. The Jewish community on the island of Jerba dates back 2,500 years. There are also 150 members of the Baha'i Faith.

There is no information available regarding the number of atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary organizations and groups operate; however, they are not permitted to proselytize in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Islam is the state religion. The Constitution provides for the free exercise of other religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally observes and enforces this right; however, it does not permit the establishment of political parties based on religion, prohibits proselytizing, and partially limits the religious freedom of Baha'is. The Constitution stipulates that the President of the Republic must be a Muslim.

The Government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations that were established before independence in 1956. Although the Government permits Christian churches to operate freely, only the Catholic Church has formal recognition from the post-independence Government. The other churches operate under land grants signed by the Bay of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries, which are respected by the post-independence Government. Since October 1999, the Government has not acted on a request for recognition of a Jewish religious organization in Jerba; however, the group has been permitted to operate and it performs religious activities and charitable work unhindered.

The Muslim holidays of Aid El-Kebir, Ras Al-Am El-Hejri, Mouled, and Aid Essighir are observed as national holidays.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance and by facilitating and promoting the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue. In 2000 the University of Manouba established the only chair of comparative religion in the country with the help of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls and subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of prayer leaders. The President appoints the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The 1988 Law on Mosques provides that only personnel appointed by the Government may lead activities in mosques, and stipulates that mosques must remain closed except during prayer times and other authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals. New mosques may be built in accordance with national urban planning regulations; however, they then become the property of the State. The Government also subsidizes partially the Jewish community.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and uses this prohibition to refuse recognition of the illegal Islamist An-Nahdha Party and to prosecute suspected party members. The Government maintains tight surveillance over Islamists and members of the Islamic fundamentalist community. The Government has revoked the identity cards of an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Islamists and fundamentalists, which prevents them from being employed legally, attending court hearings, or using public telephones or faxes. According to reliable sources, the Government has refused to issue passports to Islamists and fundamentalists, and has reportedly confiscated the passports of a small number of Tunisian Christian converts. The Government forbids the wearing of hijab (traditional headscarves worn by Islamist and Islamic fundamentalist women) in government offices. There were some reports of police requiring women to remove their hijabs in offices and on the street.

The Government allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some synagogues. In October 1999, the provisional Jewish community elected a new board of directors, its first since independence in 1956; however, the board has not met while it awaits approval from the governor of Tunis. Once the governor approves the election, which originally was expected to be only a formality, the board (now referred to as the Jewish Committee of Tunisia) is expected to receive permanent status. Approval had not been granted by the governor by the end of the period covered by this report, although approval still is expected. The Government permits the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allows Jewish children on the island of Jerba to split their academic day between secular public schools and private religious schools. The Government also encourages Jewish émigrés to return for the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the historic El-Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Jerba. However, during the period covered by this report, the Government continued to refuse recognition to a Jewish religious organization in Jerba, although the group has been permitted to operate and perform religious activities and charity work unhindered.

The Government regards the Baha'i Faith as a heretical sect of Islam and permits its adherents to practice their faith only in private. Although the Government per-

mits Baha'is to hold meetings of their National Council in private homes, it reportedly has prohibited them from organizing local councils. The Government reportedly pressures Baha'is to eschew organized religious activities. There are credible reports that police periodically call in prominent Baha'is for questioning; however, the number of such incidents decreased during the period covered by this report. The Government also unofficially denied the Baha'i request for permission to elect local assemblies during the period covered by this report. The Government also does not permit Baha'is to accept a declaration of faith from persons who wish to convert.

In general the Government does not permit Christian groups to establish new churches, and proselytizing is viewed as an act against public order. Foreign missionary organizations and groups operate; however, they are not permitted to proselytize. Authorities deport foreigners suspected of proselytizing and do not permit them to return. There were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing during the period covered by this report; however, in April 2001, there were reports that materials distributed by Christian missionaries in Sfax were confiscated from local secondary students.

There were reports of cases during the period covered by this report in which the Government punished individuals who converted to another faith from Islam by denying them the ability to obtain a passport, to vote, and to enlist in the military, among other rights.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Koranic School is part of the Government's national university system.

Both religious and secular nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) are governed by the same legal and administrative regulations that impose some restrictions on freedom of assembly. For example, all NGO's are required to notify the Government of meetings to be held in public spaces at least 3 days in advance and to submit lists of all meeting participants to the Ministry of Interior. In 2000 there were credible reports that two Christian religious organizations did not attempt to register because they believed that their applications would be rejected; however, they were able to function freely under the auspices of their respective churches. Neither group believed that it was a victim of religious discrimination. A third group, composed of foreign Christians mostly from Sweden and the United Kingdom, is active in providing medical and social services in the city of Kasserine in the west. Despite its ambiguous legal status, this group (with 15 to 20 members) reports that it has been free to pursue its social and medical work without interference and states that it does not believe that it has been subject to religious discrimination.

Religious groups are subjected to the same restrictions on freedom of speech and the press as secular groups. Primary among these restrictions is "depot legal," which formerly required that printers and publishers provide copies of all publications to the Chief Prosecutor, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Culture prior to publication. In April 2001, the Chamber of Deputies approved several changes to the Press Code, including the designation of the Ministry of Human Rights, Communications, and Relations with the Chamber of Deputies as the sole central censorship office. Similarly, distributors must deposit copies of publications printed abroad with the Chief Prosecutor and various ministries prior to their public release. Although Christian groups reported that they were able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty, they claimed that the Government generally did not approve either publication or distribution of Arabic-language Christian material. Moreover, authorized distribution of religious publications was limited to existing religious communities, because the Government views public distribution of religious documents as a threat to public order and hence an illegal act.

Muslim women are not permitted to marry outside their religion. Marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslim men abroad are considered common law, which are prohibited and thus void when the couple returns to the country. Non-Muslim women who marry Muslim men are not permitted to inherit from their husbands, nor may the husband and any children (who are considered Muslim) from the marriage inherit from the non-Muslim wife.

Civil law is codified; however, judges are known to override codified law if their interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law) contradicts it. For example, codified laws provide women with the legal right to have custody over minor children; however, judges have refused to grant women permission to leave the country with minor children, holding that Shari'a appoints the father as the head of the family and that he must grant children permission to travel.

Generally, Shari'a based interpretation of civil law is applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the application of Shari'a in inheritance questions by exe-

cuting sales contracts between parents and children to ensure that sons and daughters receive equal shares of property.

In court a woman's testimony is worth the same as a man's.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, credible sources estimate as many as 1,000 persons were serving prison sentences because of their membership in the illegal Islamist group An-Nahdha or for their alleged Islamist sympathies; however, there were no reports of cases in which it was clear that persons were arrested or detained based solely on their religious beliefs. The Government claims An-Nahdha is a terrorist organization and has accused it of plotting the overthrow of the Government in the early 1990's. A credible source reported that high-ranking leaders of the illegal An-Nahdha have been held in solitary confinement since 1991. Sadok Chourou, a former An-Nahdha member who was sentenced in 1991 for membership in an illegal organization, conducted a hunger strike in May 2001 and again in June 2002 to protest his isolated confinement and the denial of visits by his family.

During the period covered by this report, the Government tried and convicted numerous suspected members of the Islamist community on charges of belonging to an illegal organization. Twenty alleged An-Nahdha members were tried before a criminal court on April 17, 2001, after nearly 4 years in detention. Among them were Ahmed Laamari, Yousef Khedri, and Chokri Gargoui. All the defendants were found guilty of membership in An-Nahdha and sentenced to between 3 and 8 years of prison. Mehdi Zoughah was convicted in February 2001 of belonging to an illegal organization for purportedly holding a meeting with An-Nahdha leader Salah Kerker in Marseille, France, in the early 1990's. Zoughah was convicted on the basis of a single witness whom the Government could not produce in court. Zoughah also was sentenced to 2 years administrative control after his release, under which he is required to sign in at a local police station three times a day. On March 30, 2001, Zougah was released as a result of international pressure. In March 2001, Haroun Mbarek was convicted of belonging to An-Nahdha on the basis of a witness' statement that had been retracted. In May 2001, Mbarek was released from prison on conditional parole. Mbarek's passport eventually was returned to him and, in September 2001, he was granted his ministerial permit from Canadian authorities to return to Canada. Presiding judges in trials of Islamists routinely refuse to investigate claims by defendants that their confessions were extracted under torture.

The Government also continued to place Islamists under administrative control. For example, Hedi Bejaoui has been under administrative control since 1990. Bejaoui was arrested and released in 1990 for membership in An-Nahdha. In May 2001 he began a hunger strike that lasted 6 weeks (ending on June 26, 2001) to protest his administrative control and the seizure of his passport. Bejaoui attempted to travel abroad for medical treatment after the authorities took his medical insurance card.

Sources also report that police awaken suspected Islamists in the night and bring them to police headquarters for interrogation. Human rights activists allege that the Government subjected the family members of Islamist activists to arbitrary arrest and other restrictions, reportedly utilizing charges of "association with criminal elements" to punish family members. For example, one female medical doctor claims that she has been unemployed since 1997 because police have pressured hospitals not to hire her because her husband was convicted of membership in An-Nahdha. One man claimed that for 8 years, the Government refused to issue him a passport because his brother was prosecuted for membership in An-Nahdha.

According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques. Reliable sources report that the authorities instruct imams to espouse government social and economic programs during prayer times in mosques.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who have 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 generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, there were incidents of possible religiously motivated violence. In March 2002, a synagogue in the Tunis suburb of La Marsa was broken into and vandalized. In April 2002 a synagogue in Sfax, a southern commercial city also was vandalized. No injuries were reported and damage at each of the synagogues was minor. The Government responded by increasing security at both sites.

On April 11, 2002, a terrorist attack outside the historic El-Ghriba synagogue on the island of Jerba killed 21 persons and damaged the interior of the synagogue. Two weeks before the annual ElGhriba pilgrimage (See Section I), the driver of a truck transporting liquid gas detonated an explosive device while the truck stood at the Synagogue's compound wall. The explosion killed 17 tourists and 4 Tunisians, including the driver. The Government initially claimed that the explosion was an accident; however, on April 22, after German authorities became involved in the investigation it admitted that the incident was an attack. The Government provided increased security for the synagogue and encouraged pilgrims and tourists to visit El-Ghriba despite the attack.

There is great societal pressure for Muslims not to convert to other religions, and conversion from Islam is relatively rare. Muslims who do convert may face social ostracism for converting. There is some conversion among individuals in the Christian and Jewish communities.

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 good relations with leaders of majority and minority religious groups throughout the country, and the Ambassador and other embassy officials met regularly with Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i religious leaders throughout the period covered by this report. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with government officials on various occasions during the year.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Federal Constitution designates Islam as the official religion, and Islam is also the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Federal Constitution also provides for the freedom to exercise religious worship in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or violate public morals, and the Government generally respects this right in practice and does not interfere with the private practice of religion; however, it controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby greatly limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Government permits de facto recognition of a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land use permits to build and operate churches,

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. Permission for land use was given to three Christian churches, and one new church opened.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to a relatively tolerant atmosphere for the practice of a wide variety of faiths, albeit within the context of a predominantly Muslim society in which Islam has a privileged status and not all non-Islamic religions enjoy equal treatment.

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's total land area is 32,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.1 million. More than 80 percent of the population are noncitizens. Virtually all of the country's citizens are Muslims, with approximately 85 percent followers of Sunni Islam and the remaining 15 percent followers of Shi'a Islam. Foreigners are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there are a substantial number of professionals from the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Although no official figures are available, local observers estimate that approximately 55 percent of the foreign population are Muslim, 25 percent are Hindu, 10 percent are Christian, 5 percent are Buddhist, and 5 percent (most of whom reside in Dubai and Abu Dhabi) are a mixture of other faiths, including Parsi, Baha'i, and Sikh.

Although the Government does not permit foreign missionaries to proselytize, they have performed nontraditional humanitarian missionary work since before the country's independence in 1971. In 1960 Christian missionaries opened a maternity hospital in Abu Dhabi Emirate; the hospital continues to operate. Missionaries also operate a maternity hospital in Fujeirah Emirate. An International Bible Society representative in AlAin distributes bibles and other religious material to Christian religious groups here.

There are no available statistics on the number of atheists.

SECTION II: STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Federal Constitution designates Islam as the official religion, and Islam is also the official religion of all seven of the individual emirates in the federal union. The Federal Constitution also provides for the freedom to exercise religious worship in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or violate public morals, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby greatly limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Government permits de facto recognition of a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land use permits for the construction and operation of churches. The Government funds or subsidizes virtually all Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams. The Government also distributes guidance on religious sermons and monitors for political content sermons delivered in all mosques, whether Sunni or Shi'a; however, except in Dubai, it does not appoint the imams in the country's Shi'a mosques.

Virtually all Sunni mosques are government funded or subsidized; approximately 5 percent of Sunni mosques are entirely private, and several large mosques have large private endowments.

The Shi'a minority, which is concentrated in the northern emirates, is free to worship and maintain its own mosques. All Shi'a mosques are considered private and receive no funds from the Government. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf operates as the central federal regulatory authority for Muslim imams and mosques. There is no such authority for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religions, and no licensing or registration requirements.

The Government follows a policy of tolerance towards non-Muslim religions and, in practice, interferes very little in the religious activities of non-Muslims. Apparent differences in the treatment of Muslim and non-Muslim groups often have their origin in the dichotomy between citizens and noncitizens rather than religious difference.

As the state religion, Islam is favored over other religions and conversion to Islam is looked upon favorably. A list of Muslim converts is published annually. Prisoners who convert to Islam often receive a reduction in their sentence. Anecdotal evidence reveals that private sources often provide converts to Islam with monetary payments and job offers.

Muslim religious holidays are granted status as national holidays, namely, Waqfa, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Prophet's Birthday, Ascension Day, and Eid Al-Fitr. There are no reports that these holidays negatively impact other religious groups because of their religious affiliation. However, all residents and visitors are required by law during Ramadan to respect and abide by some of the behavior restrictions imposed on Muslims, and are forbidden publicly to eat, drink, or smoke during fasting hours.

The principal religious advisor to Abu Dhabi Emirate's Ruler regularly represents the country at ecumenical conferences and events in other countries. In 1999 Dubai Emirate established a center for the promotion of cultural understanding aimed at expanding contact and interchange between citizens and resident foreigners. One of the center's goals is to expose foreigners to aspects of the indigenous culture, including Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf distributes weekly guidance to both Sunni imams and Shi'a sheikhs regarding religious sermons and ensures that clergy do not deviate frequently or significantly from approved topics in their sermons. All Sunni imams are employees of either the Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf or of individual emirate ministries. Except in Dubai, where the Department of Islamic Affairs and Endowments controls in all mosques the appointment of preachers and the conduct of their work, the Government does not appoint sheikhs for Shi'a mosques.

There does not appear to be a formalized method for granting religious groups official status. Rather, the ruling families may grant access to land and permission to build a church thereon. Since not all religious groups have land-use grants with churches built thereon, several unrelated Christian congregations are required to

share common facilities. Even so, because Islam considers Christianity to be one of the three monotheistic religions, facilities for Christian congregations are far greater in number and size than those for non-Christian and non-Muslim groups, despite the fact that Christians represent less than a quarter of non-Muslim foreigners.

Some non-Muslims are permitted to practice their religion freely in religious compounds built on land grants from the local rulers. In such cases, a religious group leader requests from the local ruler a grant of land (title to which remains with the ruler) and permission to build a church thereon. Religious groups without land grants and churches built thereon are limited in their ability to assemble for worship and to conduct business, but are allowed to worship on the compounds of other religious groups if permitted by such religious groups to do so. Discreet, offcompound private and public gatherings are not targeted or disrupted by the police or other security forces.

Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah have approximately 20 Christian church buildings built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they are located. Three emirates are home to Catholic primary and secondary schools, and in 2001 the Catholic Church received permission to establish a secondary school in Fujairah.

In 1999 land was designated in Ras Al-Khaymah Emirate for the construction of a new Catholic church, but the church has not yet received permission to open, even though construction was completed in 2000. In early 2001, ground was broken in Jebel Ali for the construction of several churches on a parcel of land donated by the Government of Dubai to four Protestant congregations and a Catholic congregation. The Catholic church opened in November 2001. In May 2001, the Crown Prince of Dubai authorized the construction of a Greek Orthodox church on donated land.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai Emirates have donated land for Christian cemeteries, and Abu Dhabi has donated land for a Bah'ai cemetery. The Dubai Government permits one Hindu temple and two Sikh temples to operate. There are no such temples elsewhere in the country. There are no Buddhist temples; however, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs in cities without temples, conduct religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There are only two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one in Dubai and one in Sharjah. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance, posing a hardship for the large Hindu community.

Non-Muslim religious groups do not receive funds from the Government. However, those with land grants are not charged rental payments, and some of the churches constructed on land grants were donated by the local ruling families. Also, the Sharjah government waives payment of utilities for churches because they are religious buildings. Non-Muslim groups are permitted to raise money from among their congregants and to receive financial support from abroad. Christian churches are permitted to advertise in the press certain church functions, such as memorial services.

The conversion of Muslims to other religions is regarded with extreme antipathy; therefore, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing or distributing religious literature under penalty of criminal prosecution and imprisonment. In March 2001, Dubai police arrested four visiting noncitizens for violating laws barring non-Muslims from proselytizing because they distributed Christian religious materials, including videos and CD-ROMS, on a public street. One of those arrested was detained for less than a week. Authorities held the passports of those arrested during the investigation. They were able to move freely about Dubai but not permitted to leave the city. The charges against the noncitizens were dropped on April 8, 2001, and they left the country on April 9.

The authorities have threatened to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of missionary activities. In addition customs authorities have questioned the entry of large quantities of religious materials (such as Bibles and hymnals) that they deemed in excess of the normal requirements of existing congregations, although in most instances the items have been permitted entry. Customs authorities reportedly are less likely to question the importation of Christian religious items than non-Muslim, non-Christian religious items, although in virtually all instances importation of the material in question eventually has been permitted.

Immigration authorities routinely ask foreigners to declare their religious affiliation, however, the Government does not collect or analyze this information, and religious affiliation is not a factor in the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits. In late 2001, Abu Dhabi inquired about religious affiliation in its first municipalitywide census.

Non-Muslims are tried for criminal offenses in Shari'a courts. However, they may receive civil penalties at the discretion of the judge. Shari'a penalties imposed on non-Muslims also may be overturned or modified by a higher court.

Family law for Muslims is governed by Shari'a and the local Shari'a courts. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women; however, Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men unless the men convert to Islam. Because Islam does not consider the marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both are subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of fornication. Shari'a, according to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, also is applied in cases of divorce. Women are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of maturity and are granted temporary custody of male children until they reach the age of 12. If the mother is deemed unfit, custody reverts to the next able female relative on the mother's side. Shari'a permits polygyny.

Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools (schools supported by the Federal Government for primarily citizen children) and in private schools for Muslim children. Religious instruction in non-Muslim religions is not permitted in schools. However, religious groups conduct religious instruction for their members on their religious compounds.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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

Three new permits for access to land and permission to build were extended to Christian churches in major cities during the period covered by this report. In April 2002, the Al Ain municipality government authorized a land grant to the Anglican Church. In early 2002, the Fujairah government authorized land grants for the construction of an Indian Orthodox Church and a Catholic Church. A Catholic church, Dubai Emirate's second, opened in Jebel Ali in November 2001. Also during the period covered by the report, the Catholic Church received permission to establish a secondary school in Fujairah.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While citizens regard the country as a Muslim nation that should respect Muslim religious sensibilities on matters such as public consumption of alcohol, proper dress, and proper public comportment, society also places a high value on respect for privacy and on Islamic traditions of tolerance, particularly with respect to forms of Christianity. Modest casual attire for men and women generally is permitted in most emirates and facilities frequented by foreigners. Many hotels, stores, and other businesses patronized by both citizens and foreigners are permitted to sell alcohol and pork to non-Muslims, and to acknowledge non-Muslim holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali (although such displays generally are not permitted during the month of Ramadan). Citizens occasionally express concern regarding the influence on society of the cultures of the country's foreign majority. However, in general citizens are familiar with foreign societies and believe that they are able to best limit unwanted foreign influence by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions. Slightly less tolerant attitudes by citizens toward non-Muslim and non-Christian faiths reflect both traditional Islamic views of these religions and the fact that Hindus and Buddhists in the country are overwhelmingly less educated, less affluent, and work in less desirable occupations.

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.

In early 1998, the Ambassador sent a letter to the Government of Dubai emirate in support of the request of three Protestant congregations for expanded facilities in Dubai, and later raised the issue in official meetings with Dubai emirate leaders. In response to these requests—and with the support of the U.S. and UK Embassies—Dubai emirate donated land for these facilities and granted permission for their construction. While originally three churches were proposed, the Dubai municipality instructed that the number of churches to be built on the site increase from three to seven. In early 2001, ground was broken for the construction of several churches on the site. In early 2001, the U.S. Ambassador sent a letter to the government of the Dubai emirate in support of the request of the Greek Orthodox congregation for the construction of a church in Dubai; the request was quickly approved by the Crown Prince of Dubai. The Ambassador and other embassy personnel have participated regularly in ceremonies marking the opening or expansion

of religious facilities, and embassy officers meet on occasion with Muslims, Christians, and representatives of other religious faiths.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of the Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the Kingdom of Morocco.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The territory has a total area of approximately 102,706 square miles, and its population is approximately 245,000. The overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

There is a tiny foreign community working for the United Nations Interposition Force in the territory (known by its French acronym, MINURSO).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of the Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the Western Sahara are similar to those found in Morocco.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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 generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom issues in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights in the Western Sahara.

YEMEN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The Constitution also states that Shari'a (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Followers of religions other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government forbids conversions and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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 328,080 square miles, and its population is approximately 18 million. Virtually all citizens are Muslims, either of the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam, representing approximately 30 percent and 70 percent of the total population, respectively. There also are a few thousand Ismaili Muslims, mostly in the north.

Almost all Christians are temporary foreign residents, except for a few families living in Aden who trace their origins to India. There are a few Hindus in Aden who also trace their origins to India. There are several churches and Hindu places of worship in Aden, but no non-Muslim public places of worship exist in the former North Yemen, largely because northern Yemen does not have a history of a large, resident foreign community as in the south.

Christian missionaries operate in Yemen and most are dedicated to the provision of medical services; others are employed in teaching and social services. Invited by the Government, the Sisters of Charity run homes for the poor and persons with disabilities in Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeida, and Aden. The Government has requested the Vatican to open additional Sisters of Charity facilities. The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for the community's religious needs. There is also a German Christian charitable mission in Hodeida and a Dutch Christian medical mission in Saada. An American Baptist congregation has run a hospital in Jibla for more than 30 years. The Anglican Church runs a charitable clinic in Aden. An American nongovernmental organization (NGO), run by the Seventh-Day Adventists, operates in the governorate of Hodeida.

Nearly all of the country's once sizable Jewish population has emigrated. Approximately 500 Jews are scattered in a handful of villages between Sana'a and Saada in northern Yemen.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. Followers of other religions are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress; however, the Government forbids conversions, requires permission for the construction of new places of worship, and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing and holding elected office. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The Constitution also states that Shari'a is the source of all legislation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing. Under Islam as applied in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death. There were no reports of cases in which the crime was charged or prosecuted by government authorities. In January 2000, the director of the Aden office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) received a report that a Somali refugee, who allegedly had converted from Islam to Christianity after his arrival in Yemen, had been arrested for apostasy. The UNHCR's investigation found that the refugee had been detained on criminal charges previously by police in Aden and at the UNHCR's Al-Jahin camp. Although the refugee was registered with the UNHCR under a Christian name, he maintained an address in Sana'a under a Muslim name, was married to a Muslim woman, and possessed an Islamic marriage certificate. The UNHCR believed that authorities detained the refugee on criminal rather than religious grounds. The refugee was not charged formally and his trial was canceled. He was remanded to immigration detention, then released in July 2000. The UNHCR, with the Government's knowledge, arranged for the refugee to be resettled in a third country; he and his family departed the country on August 25, 2000.

The Government does not allow the building of new non-Muslim public places of worship without permission; however, in 1998 the country established diplomatic relations with the Vatican and agreed to the construction and operation of a "Christian center" in Sana'a. Weekly services for Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Christians are held in the auditorium of a private company building in Sana'a without government interference. Christian church services are held regularly in other cities in private homes or facilities such as schools without harassment, and such facilities appear adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

The Papal Nuncio, resident in Kuwait, presented his credentials to the Government in May 2002 and was accredited as a nonresident ambassador. The country's ambassador to Italy was accredited to the Vatican in July 1999. President Ali Abdullah Saleh paid an official visit to the Vatican at the time of his state visit to Italy in April 2000.

Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions. However, almost all non-Muslims are foreigners who attend private schools.

There are no legal restrictions on the few hundred Jews who remain in the country, although there are traditional restrictions on places of residence and choice of employment (see Section III). In mid-2000 the Government suspended its policy of allowing Yemeni-origin Israeli passport holders to travel to Yemen on laissez-passer documents. However, Yemeni, Israeli, and other Jews may travel freely to and within the country on non-Israeli passports.

The Government has attempted to prevent the politicization of mosques in an attempt to curb extremism, including by monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considers harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations may maintain ties to pan-Islamic organizations and, in the past, have operated private schools; however, the Government monitors their activities. In May 2001, the Government mandated the implementation of a 1992 law to unify educational curriculums and administration of all publicly funded schools; the process of absorbing publicly funded Islamic schools into the national system was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Non-Muslims may vote; however, they may not hold elected office.

Following unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, owners of property previously expropriated by the Communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, including religious organizations, were invited to seek restitution of their property. However, implementation of the process, including for religious institutions, has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to any previous owner.

Shari'a-based law and social custom discriminate against women. Men are permitted to take as many as four wives, although very few do so. By law the minimum age of marriage is 15. However, the law largely is not enforced, and some girls marry as early as age 12. In October 2001, the Women's National Committee proposed an amendment to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18. The proposal was approved by the Cabinet and was pending in the Parliament at the end of the period covered by this report. The law stipulates that the wife's "consent" to the marriage is required; "consent" is defined as "silence" for previously unwed women and "pronouncement of consent" for divorced women. The husband and the wife's "guardian" (usually her father) sign the marriage contract; in Aden and some outlying governorates, the wife also signs. The practice of bride-price payments is widespread, despite efforts to limit the size of such payments.

The law provides that the wife must obey the husband. She must live with him at the place stipulated in the contract, consummate the marriage, and not leave the home without his consent. Husbands may divorce wives without justifying their action in court; however, courts routinely mandate lengthy reconciliation periods prior to granting the husband's petition for divorce. A woman has the legal right to divorce; however, she must provide a justification, such as her husband's nonsupport, impotence, abrogation of the marriage contract (for example, of guarantees regarding her education or employment options), or taking of a second wife without her consent. A woman seeking a divorce also must repay the mahr (a portion of her bride price), which creates an additional hardship.

Women who seek to travel abroad must obtain permission from their husbands or fathers to receive a passport and to travel. They also are expected to be accompanied by male relatives. However, enforcement of this requirement is irregular. Shari'a-based law permits a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but no Muslim woman may marry outside of Islam. Women do not have the right to confer citizenship on their foreign-born spouses; however, they may confer citizenship on children born in the country of foreign-born fathers.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Official government policy does not prohibit or provide punishment for the possession of non-Islamic religious literature. However, on occasion, there were unconfirmed reports that foreigners were harassed by police for possessing such literature. In addition some members of the security forces occasionally censor the mail of Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing.

There were unconfirmed reports that some police, without the authorization or knowledge of their superiors, on occasion have harassed and detained persons suspected of apostasy in order to compel them to renounce their conversions.

There were no reports of persons detained or imprisoned based solely on religion. Police and security forces detained suspected members of radical Islamist groups throughout the period covered by this report. Since September 2001, several hundred "Afghan Arabs" (Islamists who had returned after spending time in Afghanistan) have been detained for questioning. Many such persons were released in days; however, some reportedly continue to be detained beyond the maximum detention period.

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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country is overwhelmingly Muslim. There are very small numbers of religious minorities, and relations among religious groups generally are amicable. There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of the two main orders of Islam, Zaydi and Shafa'i Islam. Religiously motivated violence is neither incited nor tolerated by the Islamic clergy, except for a small politically motivated clerical minority often with ties to foreign extremist elements.

Religious minorities generally live in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. Apart from a small but undetermined number of Christians and Hindus of South Asian origin in Aden, Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Their numbers have diminished significantly—from several tens of thousands to a few hundred—due to voluntary emigration over the last 50 years. Although the law makes no distinction, Jews traditionally are restricted to living in one section of a city or village and often are confined to a limited choice of employment, usually farming or handicrafts (primarily silver working). They are respected for their craftsmanship and their silver work is highly prized. Jews may, and do, own land. They may vote; however, as non-Muslims, they may not hold elected office (see Section II). Traditionally the tribal leaders of the regions in which the Jews have resided are responsible for protecting the Jews in their areas. A failure to provide this protection is considered a serious personal dishonor.

Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community are employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

On January 1, 2001, a small bomb blasted a 12-foot hole in the wall of Christ Church in Aden; there were no reported injuries. Five individuals believed to be linked to extremist Islamic groups were arrested in January 2001. In July 2001, all five were convicted for committing an act of terrorism. The appeals court reduced the primary perpetrator's sentence from 20 years to 15 years, while the other four were sentenced to varying periods of between 5 and 10 years. On January 10, 2001, in the village of Dhabyan in Amran governorate, an armed Muslim opened fire on worshipers during evening prayers at the local mosque; 4 men were killed and 17 wounded, 7 critically. The shootings appeared to be criminally rather than religiously motivated.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy maintains an active dialog on human rights issues with the Government, NGO's, and others, and discusses religious freedom issues in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, meet periodically with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities.