

Countries of Particular Concern: China

The Chinese government continues to engage in particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The State Department has stated publicly that conditions of human rights, including religious freedom, deteriorated in 2003. Moreover, the Chinese government has not made any progress in fulfilling commitments it had undertaken during the December 2002 U.S.-China Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue. The releases in 2002 of prominent individuals, particularly Tibetan Buddhists, as well as renewed contact between China and the Dalai Lama's representatives have not brought any change in the government's overall policy of control over religious belief and practice. By most accounts, prominent religious leaders and laypersons alike continue to be confined, tortured, imprisoned, and subject to other forms of ill treatment on account of their religion or belief. Groups subject to such repression include Protestant Christians, Roman Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, and others, such as members of Falun Gong, that the government has labeled "evil cults." Chinese government officials continue to claim the right to control, monitor, and restrain religious practice, purportedly to protect public safety, order, or health. However, the government's actions to restrict religious belief and practice go far beyond legitimate protection of security interests and exceed what is permissible under international law.

During the past year, and particularly since the December 2002 Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue, conditions for unregistered Protestant Christians have worsened. Pastor Gong Shengliang of the unregistered South China Church-sentenced to death after the adoption of the 1999 "evil cult" law-continues to languish in prison, and he is reportedly denied proper medical care. In September 2003, Henan provincial officials arrested two of his associates, one of whom was charged with "subverting the national government." The two were released in October 2003 as a result of international pressure. Chinese officials continue to engage in the destruction of "illegal" religious buildings, particularly in Zhejiang province, where local officials destroyed as many as 3,000 churches, temples, and shrines in November-December 2000. In July 2003, local officials raided a house church in Zhejiang and arrested six church leaders. The government also continues its repression of the Roman Catholic Church in China. At least 10 Roman Catholic bishops, including Bishop Su Zhimin, whose whereabouts are unknown, are imprisoned, in detention, under house arrests, or under surveillance. In July 2002, three priests affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church were sentenced to three years in a labor camp after having been convicted of practicing "cult" activities. In October 2003, Hebei provincial officials reportedly arrested 12 Roman Catholic priests and seminarians who were attending a religious retreat.

In largely Muslim Xinjiang province, religious freedom is severely curtailed by the government, which often links Uighur Muslim religious expression with "separatist" or "terrorist" acts. Since September 11, 2001, the government has used concerns about international terrorism as a pretext for an ongoing crackdown in Xinjiang, where Uighur Muslim clerics and students have been detained for "illegal" religious activities and "illegal

religious centers" have been closed. This campaign against Muslims in Xinjiang intensified in January 2003, when the region's Communist Party Secretary announced the government's aim of eliminating "religious extremists," "splittists," and "terrorists," resulting in the arrest of many more Uighur Muslim clerics.

The Chinese government retains tight control over religious activity and places of worship in Tibet. Hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns remain in prison and are reportedly subject to torture and other extreme forms of punishment. In January 2003, at the conclusion of the December 2002 Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue, a local court sentenced Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, and Lobsang Dondrup to death for their alleged involvement in a bombing incident in Sichuan province in April 2002. On the day of the sentencing, Lobsang Dondrup was executed, while Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche was given a suspended sentence. The execution was carried out despite assurances to senior U.S. officials that the two cases would be referred to China's Supreme Court. In October 2003, another monk, Nyima Dragpa, died as a result of repeated torture while serving a nine-year sentence for advocating Tibetan independence. In addition, the Chinese government continues to deny repeated requests for access to the 12-year-old boy whom the Dalai Lama recognizes as the 11th Panchen Lama. Government officials have stated that he is being "held for his own safety," while also claiming that another boy is the true Panchen Lama.

The Chinese government maintains that the Falun Gong movement as a "cult," effectively banning that organization and "justifying" its ongoing brutal crackdown against the movement and its followers. According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, in the last four years, over 100,000 practitioners have been sent to labor camps without trial, and over 1,000 have been tortured in mental hospitals, including 430 who have been killed as a result of police brutality. According to the Falun Gong, the Chinese government has continued to pressure foreign businesses in China to discriminate against its followers. Many local officials in foreign countries also stated that they had received warnings from Chinese diplomatic personnel to withdraw their support of Falun Gong and its practitioners.

With regard to China, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should:

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ensure that efforts to promote religious freedom in China are integrated into the mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation with the Chinese government at all levels, across all departments of the U.S. government, and on all issues, including security and counter-terrorism;

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urge the Chinese government to end its current crackdown on religious and spiritual groups throughout China, including harassment, surveillance, arrest, and detention of persons on account of their manifestation of religion or belief; the detention, torture, and ill-treatment of persons in prisons, labor camps, psychiatric facilities, and other places of confinement; and the coercion of individuals to renounce or condemn any religion or belief;

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urge the Chinese government to change its system of laws, policies, and practices that govern religious and spiritual organizations and activities, and hold accountable violators of the right to freedom of religion and belief and the human rights of religious believers;

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urge the Chinese government to respect fully the universality of the right to freedom of religion and belief and other human rights and ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

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undertake to strengthen scrutiny by international and U.S. bodies of China's human rights practices and the implementation of its international obligations;

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prohibit U.S. companies doing business in China from engaging in practices that would constitute or facilitate violations of religious freedom or discrimination on the basis of religion or belief;

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raise the profile of the conditions of Uighur Muslims by addressing religious freedom and human rights concerns in bilateral talks; by increasing the number of educational opportunities in the United States available to Uighurs; and by increasing radio

broadcasts in the Uighur language;

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endeavor to establish an official U.S. government presence, such as a consulate, in Lhasa, Tibet and Urumqi, Xinjiang, in order to monitor religious freedom and other human rights; and

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speak directly to the Chinese people on U.S. policy to promote freedom of religion and use U.S. programs to support those in China advocating rule of law and respect for China's international human rights obligations.