

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

To think, believe, or doubt. To speak or pray; to gather or stand apart. Such are the movements of the mind and heart, infinitives that take us beyond the finite. Freedom of religion, like all freedoms of thought and expression, are inherent. Our beliefs help define who we are and serve as a foundation for what we contribute to our societies. However, as the 2011 International Religious Freedom Report documents, too many people live under governments that abuse or restrict freedom of religion. People awaken, work, suffer, celebrate, raise children, and mourn unable to follow the dictates of their faith or conscience. Yet, under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, governments have committed to respect freedom of religion. As President Barack Obama said, they ought to "bear witness and speak out" when violations of religious freedom occur.

With these reports, we bear witness and speak out. We speak against authoritarian governments that repressed forms of expression, including religious freedom. Governments restricted religious freedom in a variety of ways, including registration laws that favored state-sanctioned groups, blasphemy laws, and treatment of religious groups as security threats. The report focuses special attention on key trends such as the impact of political and demographic transitions on religious minorities, who tended to suffer the most in 2011; the effects of conflict on religious freedom; and the rising tide of anti-Semitism. Impacted groups, to name just a few, included Baha'is and Sufis in **Iran**; Christians in **Egypt**; Ahmadis in **Indonesia** and **Pakistan**; Muslims in a range of countries, including in Europe; Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and Uighur Muslims in **China**; and Jews in many parts of the world.

Religious minorities in political and demographic transitions

In 2011, the world watched as people in North Africa and the Middle East stood up for dignity, opportunity, and civil and political liberty. In countries in political transition, such as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, people took the first steps of what will likely be a challenging path toward democracy. In times of transition, the

situation of religious minorities in these societies comes to the forefront. Some members of society who have long been oppressed seek greater freedom and respect for their rights while others fear change. Those differing aspirations can exacerbate existing tensions.

The interim government of **Egypt** began to take measures toward greater inclusiveness, such as passing an anti-discrimination law; arresting and prosecuting alleged instigators of sectarian rioting; and allowing dozens of churches previously closed to reopen. Nevertheless, sectarian tensions and violence increased during the year, along with an overall increase in violence and criminality. This report documents both the Egyptian government's failure to curb rising violence against Coptic Christians and its involvement in violent attacks. For example, on October 9, 2011, the Egyptian security forces attacked demonstrators in front of the Egyptian radio and television building in the Maspero area of Cairo. Twenty-five people were killed and 350 injured, most of whom were Coptic Christians. To date, government officials have not been held accountable for their actions, and there were indications in early 2012 of mounting Coptic emigration.

Following the overthrow of Muammar Qadhafi in October 2011, the new government in **Libya** chose not to enforce some old laws that restricted religious freedom, ceased actively regulating all aspects of religious life, and enshrined the free practice of religion in an interim constitution, which also outlawed discrimination based on religion or sect. Early in 2012, the Libyan Supreme Court overturned a law that criminalized insults against Islam, the state, and religious symbols. Qadhafi-era laws prohibiting certain affronts to Islam, however, remained on the books even though there were no attempts to enforce them.

Transitions were not limited to the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. In **Burma**, a Country of Particular Concern, the government took steps toward overcoming a longstanding legacy of intense religious oppression. The government eased some restrictions on church construction and generally permitted adherents of religious groups registered with the government to worship as they chose. However, the government continued to impose restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently limited religious freedom. It also continued to monitor the meetings and activities of all organizations, including religious organizations, and required religious groups to seek permission from authorities before holding any large public events. Some of the Buddhist monks arrested in 2007 were released during the year and have not faced harassment since their release, but others were released with conditions attached or remained in prison serving long sentences. The government also refused to recognize the

Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority as citizens and imposed restrictions on their movement and marriage.

Countries in Europe are becoming more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse. These demographic changes are sometimes accompanied by growing xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and intolerance toward people considered "the other." The report documents a rising number of European countries, including Belgium and France, whose laws restricting dress adversely affected Muslims and others. In a separate context, Hungary's parliament passed a law that regulates registration of religious organizations and requires a political vote in parliament to secure recognition. The law went into effect on January 1, 2012, reducing the number of recognized religious groups from over 300 to fewer than 32.

Effects of conflict on religious freedom

In 2011, governments responded to conflict and to groups they considered to be "violent extremists" in ways that restricted religious freedom and contributed to societal intolerance in countries as diverse as **Bahrain, Russia, Iraq, and Nigeria**. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities.

In **Bahrain**, the Sunni minority enjoyed favored status. During the state of emergency from March 15 to June 1, the government arrested and detained protestors, the vast majority of whom were members of the Shia community. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry received reports that 53 religious structures were demolished, largely during the ongoing unrest. The Commission recommended that the government rebuild some of the demolished structures.

In **Russia**, violent extremism in the North Caucasus region led to negative popular attitudes in many other regions toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups. The government continued to use the "Law on Combating Extremist Activity" to justify raids on religious organizations, detain and prosecute their members, and restrict the freedom to worship of minority group members, particularly targeting Muslim followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi's works, Jehovah's Witnesses, Falun Gong, and Scientologists. Additionally, a number of small radical-nationalist newspapers printed anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles that were readily available throughout the country. Russia labeled 19 Muslim groups as terrorist organizations and banned them. Such bans made it easier for officials to detain some individual Muslims arbitrarily for alleged connections to these groups.

In **Iraq**, attacks by violent extremist groups and sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia in some parts of the country had a negative impact on the ability of all citizens to practice their religion. A combination of sectarian hiring practices, corruption, targeted attacks, and the uneven application of the law contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the country, including Christians, Yezidis, and Sabeian-Mandaeans. Notably, and in response to these challenges, the government reinforced its commitment to religious freedom by increasing security at places of worship and forming investigative committees to follow up on violent incidents.

In **Nigeria**, attacks by elements of the violent extremist sect Boko Haram claimed the lives of both Christians and Muslims. The government did not effectively quell rising hostility or investigate and prosecute those responsible for violence. There also were reports of abuses of religious freedom by certain state governments and local political actors who stoked communal and sectarian violence with impunity.

Expanded use and abuse of blasphemy laws

In 2011, governments increasingly used blasphemy, apostasy, and defamation of religion laws to restrict religious liberty, constrain the rights of religious minorities, and limit freedom of expression. In **Pakistan**, individuals accused of blasphemy or who publicly criticized the blasphemy laws and called for their reform continued to be killed, including Governor Punjab Salman Taseer and Minister of Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in the cabinet. Aasia Bibi, a Christian, remained in prison, awaiting an appeal of her 2010 death sentence, the first such sentence for blasphemy handed down against a woman. The verdict in the case touched off a debate within the country about the blasphemy laws, with extremists calling for her execution and more moderate voices calling for her pardon or an appeal of the guilty verdict.

In **Saudi Arabia**, blasphemy against the Wahabi interpretation of Sunni Islam is punishable by death, but the more common penalty is a long prison sentence. In mid-November 2011, Mansor Almaribe, an Australian Shia of Iraqi descent, was arrested and convicted in the country of blasphemy and for “insulting the companions of the Prophet.” He was sentenced to 500 lashes and a year in prison. His sentence was reduced to 75 lashes and no jail time. Almaribe was allowed to return to Australia after he received the lashes.

Indonesia detained and imprisoned individuals under its blasphemy law. For example, Antonius Richmond Bawengan, a Christian, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for blasphemy on February 8 for distributing books deemed "offensive to Islam." Discrimination and violence against Ahmadis also continued: Ahmadis who violate a government-imposed ban on proselytizing can be imprisoned for blasphemy; more than 26 regional governments enacted additional restrictions on the group; and the government failed to stop the murder of three and beating of five Ahmadis in Cikeusik, Banten province by a mob of 1,500 individuals. Video footage of the attack posted to the Internet shows members of the mob beating victims to death while police officers failed to intervene.

A rising tide of anti-Semitism

This report also documents a global increase in anti-Semitism, manifested in Holocaust denial, glorification, and relativism; conflating opposition to certain policies of Israel with blatant anti-Semitism; growing nationalistic movements that target "the other;" and traditional forms of anti-Semitism, such as conspiracy theories, acts of desecration and assault, "blood libel," and cartoons demonizing Jews. In **Venezuela**, the official media published numerous anti-Semitic statements. In **Egypt**, anti-Israel sentiment in the media was widespread and sometimes included anti-Semitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial or glorification. Web sites promoting Holocaust denial operated with **Iran's** consent. In **France**, the report documents desecration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries. **Hungary** saw the rise in popularity of an openly anti-Semitic party, the Jobbik party. Jewish property was defaced in **Ukraine**, including a synagogue and several Holocaust monuments. In both **Ukraine** and **the Netherlands**, soccer matches were marred by anti-Semitic slogans.

Chronic violators of religious freedom

A range of countries remained chronic and systemic violators of religious freedom. This report documents the ongoing state of religious repression in China, North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, and other countries with authoritarian governments. In **Iran**, Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani remained jailed and faced possible execution simply for practicing his faith. The Iranian government also continued to imprison seven leaders of the Baha'i community: Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Saeid Rezaie, Vahid Tizfahm, and Mahvash Sabet. Like other freedoms, religious freedom simply does not exist in **North Korea**.

Executive summaries of select countries

This section summarizes overall conditions in some countries where violations, improvements, or positive developments in religious freedom were noteworthy; additional information can be found in the country reports. States that Secretary Clinton designated as Countries of Particular Concern in August 2011 are denoted with an asterisk.

Afghanistan: The constitution states that “Followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law,” but also states that Islam is the “religion of the state” and that “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.” The government’s failure to protect minority religious groups and individuals limited religious freedom. For example, while the constitution expressly protects free exercise of faith for non-Muslims, in situations where the constitution and penal code are silent, including apostasy and blasphemy, courts relied on interpretations of Islamic law, some of which conflict with the country’s international commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

China*: There was a marked deterioration during 2011 in the government’s respect for and protection of religious freedom in China. In the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas, this included increased restrictions on religious practice, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. Official interference in the practice of these religious traditions exacerbated grievances and contributed to at least 12 self-immolations by Tibetans in 2011. The repression tightened in the lead-up to and during politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events, such as the third anniversary of the protests and riots in Tibetan areas that began on March 10, 2008; the observance of “Serf Emancipation Day” on March 28; the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party on July 1; the Dalai Lama’s birthday on July 6; and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the “peaceful liberation” of Tibet on July 19.

China only allows groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) to register with the government and legally hold worship services. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Proselytizing in public or unregistered places of worship is not permitted. Some religious and spiritual groups are outlawed. Tibetan

Buddhists in China are not free to venerate the Dalai Lama and encounter severe government interference in religious practice. The government continued to severely repress Muslims living in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and other parts of China. Crackdowns on Christian house churches, such as the Shouwang church in Beijing, continued. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members are required to be atheists and are generally discouraged from participating in religious activities.

Cuba: The government's respect for religious freedom improved, although significant restrictions remained in place and the Cuban Communist Party, through its Office of Religious Affairs, continued to wield regulatory control over most aspects of religious life. Most religious groups reported increased ability to cultivate new members, hold religious activities, and conduct charitable and community service projects, while at the same time reporting fewer restrictions on religious expression, importation of religious materials, and travel. However, the government's repression of peaceful human rights activists included preventing some of them from attending religious services. For example, members of the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) group were routinely prevented from attending church, a practice that was particularly pronounced in the eastern provinces of Holguin and Santiago. Adisnidia Cruz, mother of political prisoners Marcos and Antonio Lima-Cruz, was prevented from leaving her house in Holguin on Sundays to attend mass on dozens of occasions. In other instances the government harassed human rights activists immediately after religious services. On September 8, for instance, members of the Damas de Blanco were arrested after attending mass in Santiago to celebrate the day of Cuba's patron saint.

Eritrea*: The situation deteriorated as the government continued to harass and detain members of registered and unregistered religious groups, some of whom reportedly died in detention as a result of torture and lack of medical treatment. The government retained significant control over the four registered religious groups. Many places of worship closed because of government intimidation and mass conscription of religious workers and parishioners. At year's end, many estimated that the population of religious prisoners remained at 2,000 to 3,000. This estimate did not include the approximately 3,000 religious workers that were compelled to national service against their will, nor the members of the Catholic Church who engaged in protests, all of whom reportedly were released subsequently. It was unknown how many of the approximately 100 individuals detained during the year were released on the condition of recanting their faith or paying a fine.

Iran*: Religious freedom in **Iran** deteriorated further from an already egregious situation. Government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the year. Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani remained jailed and faced possible execution for practicing his faith, and sentences of the seven Baha'i leaders were re-extended to the original 20 years after having been reduced to 10 years in 2010. The government arrested the seven in 2009 for “espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic.” The government created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shia religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as for Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, Jews, Sunni, and Zoroastrians. Shia adherents who did not share the government's official religious views also faced harassment and intimidation.

North Korea*: Religious freedom does not exist in any form in North Korea. The government continued to repress unauthorized religious groups, and dealt harshly with those who engaged in religious activities it deemed unacceptable. Reports by refugees, defectors, missionaries, and nongovernmental organizations indicated that religious persons who engaged in proselytizing in the country and those who were in contact with foreigners or missionaries were arrested and subjected to harsh penalties. Refugees and defectors stated that they witnessed or heard of arrests and possible executions of underground Christian church members in prior years. Due to the country's inaccessibility and the inability of foreigners to gain timely information, the continuation of arrests and executions during the year remained difficult to quantify.

Pakistan: The situation deteriorated as some government practices limited freedom of religion, particularly for members of religious minority groups. Freedom of speech is constitutionally “subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam.” Abuses continued under the blasphemy law and other discriminatory laws, such as “the anti-Ahmadi laws”; the government did not take adequate measures to prevent these incidents or reform the laws to prevent abuse. Since the government rarely investigated or prosecuted the perpetrators of extremist attacks on religious minorities and members of the Muslim majority promoting tolerance, the number of attacks increased and the climate of impunity continued. There were instances in which law enforcement personnel reportedly abused persons belonging to religious minorities in custody. The government took some steps to improve religious freedom and promote tolerance, such as the creation of a Ministry of National Harmony after devolution of the Ministry of Minorities. Following the assassination of Minister of Minority

Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, the president appointed his brother, Paul Bhatti, as his special advisor for minority affairs.

Russia: The government generally respected religious freedom, but some minority denominations continued to experience difficulties. The most significant constraints on religious freedom during the year included the use of extremism charges to target minority religions and some broad restrictions on the freedoms of expression and association, in addition to efforts related to denial of registration as a religious organization, preventing access to places of worship, denial of visas for religious visitors, and detention of members of religious organizations. While there is no state religion, the Russian Orthodox Church and selected other “traditional” religious communities received preferential consideration.

Saudi Arabia* does not recognize freedom of religion and prohibits the public practice of any religion other than Islam. The government subjected Muslims who did not adhere to the government’s interpretation of Islam to political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination. Some non-Muslims faced harassment, detention, and death. The Saudi government revised some school textbooks, but Arabic and religion textbooks still contained overtly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians as well as intolerant references by allusion against Shia and Sufi Muslims and other religious groups.

Sudan*: The interim constitution and other laws and policies provide for some religious freedom; however, apostasy, conversion from Islam, blasphemy, and some interfaith marriages are prohibited. In addition, observers asserted that Salafists were growing as a proportion of the total Muslim population and that this growth was creating new sources of conflict with Christians and non-Salafist Muslims.

Syria: As the government's unconscionable attacks against its people escalated, civilians in the Sunni majority endured the greatest violence. The regime also targeted and destroyed churches and mosques across the country during this period of protest which began in response to regime abuses. The regime contextualized the protests within a sectarian framework, maintaining that the protesters were associated with "extreme Islamist factions." At times, popular perception among the protesters conflated the regime's brutality and killing of over 5,000 civilians with alleged Alawite violence against Sunni Muslims. This led to an increase of tension, violence, and killing between largely Alawite and Sunni communities. Some Christians, Druze, and opposition members also suffered at the hands of the

regime. As the violence grew, members of minority religious communities were increasingly vulnerable.

Turkmenistan: The government's respect for religious freedom remained low, despite provisions for religious freedom in the constitution and in some laws and policies. Discriminatory government practices in the treatment of some registered and unregistered groups continued. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities. Several religious groups remained unable to register and the government restricted even registered groups' ability to obtain places to worship and to print, distribute, or import religious materials. Although there were fewer reports of raids and arbitrary detentions involving Jehovah's Witnesses, the government continued to arrest, charge, and imprison Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors to military service.

Uzbekistan* requires religious groups to register and prohibits some activities, such as proselytizing, as well as publishing, importing, and distributing religious materials without a license. Most minority religious groups had difficulty meeting the government's strict registration requirements. In some cases, members faced heavy fines and even jail terms for violations of the state's religion laws. The government restricted religious activities that it proclaimed to be in conflict with national security and generally dealt harshly with Muslims who practice and discuss Islam outside of government-sanctioned mosques. Uzbek law prohibits religious groups from forming political parties and social movements, as well as the private teaching of religious principles.

Vietnam restricted religious freedom in a number of ways. Christians, in particular, faced challenges. The government held religious prisoners, including lay preachers Ksor Y Du and Kpa Y Ko. Hundreds of churches continued to await registration by local authorities in the Northwest Highlands, and the government has not allowed publication of the Bible in the modern H'mong language, despite pledging to do so. Authorities harassed some groups and individuals. In March authorities of An Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, and Can Tho ordered surveillance of unsanctioned Hoa Hao monks, and police blocked roads and harassed or threatened followers. Police beat one follower severely. Protestant Khmers reported harassment, intimidation, and, in some cases, property damage and beatings by Khmer Krom Buddhists in certain districts of Tra Vinh Province.

Conclusion

Even as this report documents abuses of religious freedom, the events of 2011 show that change is possible and suggests that countries whose constitution, laws, policies, and practices protect religious freedom and human rights will be the most vibrant and stable. This report documents places where intolerance does not have the last word. **Turkey** issued a decree facilitating the return of property confiscated from religious community foundations in the past. In **Ukraine**, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which represents 95 percent of religious congregations in the country, discussed with the government legal protections for religious freedom, visas for foreign religious workers, and procedures for religious organizations to obtain legal status in Ukraine. In **France**, members of a Jewish - Muslim friendship association traveled around the country to educate youth about Islam and Judaism.

The United States was active around the world promoting religious freedom, and challenging threats to such freedom. For example, senior U.S. officials, including President Barack Obama, raised deep U.S. concerns about increased religious violence and discrimination against Copts with senior **Egyptian** officials, including concerns about the government's failure to prosecute perpetrators of sectarian violence. The United States also sponsored programs in Egypt to promote religious tolerance and freedom.

To promote religious freedom in **Burma***, U.S. embassy representatives offered support to local nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders, including through small grants and training programs. The U.S. government has a wide array of sanctions in place against the country for its violations of human rights; steps to ease those sanctions depend on the government undertaking significant reform.

U.S. officials from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. embassy and consulates in Iraq met regularly with representatives of all of **Iraq's** religious and ethnic communities, including its minority communities. A U.S. government-funded program sponsored successful interfaith dialogues in areas with religious tensions, such as Kirkuk. The assistant chief of mission for assistance transition led the embassy's efforts to reach out to ethnic and religious minority communities.

The U.S. government's efforts to promote religious freedom are intertwined with our efforts to promote freedom of expression. Blasphemy laws silence voices in the name of "protecting religion." They are anathema to religious freedom since the deeply held beliefs of one religious group may be interpreted as blasphemous

by another group. The United States strongly opposed the Organization of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) 12-year campaign at the United Nations to ban so-called "defamation" of religion. At the March 2011 session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the OIC, the United States, the European Union, and all other members joined consensus on Resolution 16/18 "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief." In the fall, the UN General Assembly passed a similar resolution by consensus. This resolution helped the HRC move past the divisive and problematic debates about intolerance and expression to an action-oriented approach that is protective of human rights. In December, the United States hosted the first expert-level implementation meeting. Experts from 27 countries discussed effective government strategies to engage members of religious minorities, train officials on religious and cultural awareness, and enforce laws that prevent discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.

The United States is also giving voice to others. At an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe conference, Hannah Rosenthal, our Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and Farah Anwar Pandith, our Special Representative to Muslim Communities, traded speeches to launch the *2011 Hours Against Hate* campaign. Special Envoy Rosenthal spoke out against Muslim-hatred and Special Representative Pandith spoke out against anti-Semitism. They ended their remarks with this simple line, "Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone. Muslims cannot fight "Islamophobia" alone... Hate is hate, but we can overcome it together."

This campaign called upon young people to volunteer their time to assist persons from other communities -- a Jew for a Muslim charity, a man for a women's shelter, a Muslim for a Jewish clinic, a Christian for a Baha'i food pantry. The campaign generated so much interest and so many hours of volunteer time that it has been endorsed by the London Olympic and Paralympic Games Organizing Committee as one of its tolerance campaigns for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, now called *2012 Hours Against Hate*.

President Obama said at a celebration of Coptic Christmas in January 2012, "as history repeatedly reminds us, freedom of religion, the protection of people of all faiths, and the ability to worship as you choose are critical to a peaceful, inclusive, and thriving society." These reports document where people live, think, pray, and speak freely and where, in contrast, governments limit those freedoms, abusing the

rights of their people, violating international agreements, and diminishing the reputations of their own countries.