

JAPAN

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were few reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government closely monitored the situation of religious freedom, conducted regular outreach to minority religious groups, and discussed religious freedom issues with the government.

Section I. Religious Demography

Since the government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it is difficult to determine accurately the number of adherents of different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported that membership claims by religious groups totaled 207 million as of December 2008. This number, substantially more than the country's population of 127.4 million, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is common to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites.

According to the agency's current yearbook which shows statistics for 2008, 108 million people identified themselves as Shinto, 88 million as Buddhist, and 2.3 million as Christian, while 8.9 million followed "other" religions. There are no governmental statistics on the number of Muslims in the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

According to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, approximately 183,000 religious groups were certified by the government as religious organizations with corporate

status. The government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification; however, certified religious organizations receive tax benefits. More than 82 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2008.

The Religious Juridical Persons Law, as amended in response to the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, provides the government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The law requires certified religious organizations to disclose their assets to the government and empowers the government to investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious organization's for-profit activities if the organization violates these regulations.

The government does not observe any religious holidays as national holidays.

Government Practices

There were few reports of abuses in the country. In May, 14 Muslims filed a lawsuit against the government after documents accidentally leaked onto the Internet revealed that the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and the National Police Agency had systematically collected their personal information, including their religious activities and associations, allegedly solely because of their religion. The lawsuit was ongoing at year's end.

The government granted temporary humanitarian protective status to Chinese individuals who were Falun Gong (also referred to as Falun Dafa) practitioners resident in Japan and who filed for this status. Some of these individuals reported that the Chinese Embassy in Japan would not renew their Chinese passports due to their faith. This temporary humanitarian status allowed these individuals to remain in the country and to travel overseas using travel documents issued by the government of Japan.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief or practice.

In October 2010 a vehicle parked in front of a mosque in Fukui Prefecture with a sign reading "Foreign People Get Out" was set on fire. Leaders at the mosque, attended primarily by foreign university students living in Fukui, portrayed the

incident as isolated and unusual and said they had positive relations with the local community. Police arrested an individual for this incident late in the year.

For several years deprogrammers working with family members have reportedly abducted Unification Church members and members of other minority religious groups. The number of reported cases has declined sharply since the 1990s, but research published in December by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Without Frontiers International maintained that abductions and deprogramming of Unification Church members continue to occur. Other NGOs, however, accused the Unification Church of exaggerating or fabricating these reports. The Unification Church reported two cases in which church members were abducted during the year as well as three cases of suspected abductions. According to the church, one abductee escaped after five months of confinement and the other was released after three weeks; the three individuals whom church officials suspect were abducted all withdrew from the church. Two other members who reportedly remained confined at the end of 2010 withdrew from the church. The Unification Church also asserted that cult prevention workshops and campaigns held at universities throughout the country urged students to avoid groups affiliated with the church and contributed to a hostile campus environment for Unificationist students.

While Japanese society has been largely supportive of the right of Falun Gong practitioners to practice freely, there were reports that the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo carried out an active campaign to harass and undermine the organization by trying to persuade Japanese organizations to discriminate against Falun Gong practitioners. Some of the country's top facilities have refused to host Shen Yun Performing Arts, a New York-based performance group associated with the Falun Gong, but other smaller theaters have hosted the group. Other Falun Gong-affiliated performers have performed at large facilities. Likewise, while some Japanese companies have given in to Chinese pressure and not advertised in the Epoch Times, others have continued to advertise in the publication.

Significant interfaith efforts continued during the year. The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, an interfaith NGO, worked to promote religious culture and interfaith harmony. Members from the Islamic Center Japan spoke at churches and participated in interfaith peace prayers with Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist groups. The World Conference on Religions for Peace Japanese Committee, composed of various religious groups, hosted interfaith symposiums during the year and participated in relief efforts led by many religious organizations in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

As part of its overall policy to promote human rights, the U.S. government closely monitored the situation of religious freedom, conducted regular outreach to minority religious groups and NGOs, and discussed religious freedom with the government.