

JAPAN 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion. The government protects religious freedom by law, ensuring the rights of religious practitioners and promoting respect and tolerance in society. It granted protective status to some religious adherents claiming persecution in their native countries, including members of the Muslim Rohingya community from Burma and Falun Gong practitioners from China.

Members of the Unification Church (UC) continued to state that some new members were abducted and confined by members of their families in an effort to deconvert them.

U.S. embassy representatives met with a variety of faith-based groups and religious leaders in an effort to monitor the status of religious freedom and to promote tolerance and acceptance. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for members of the Muslim community to promote religious tolerance. Embassy representatives met with a variety of religious minorities reporting concerns, including UC and Falun Gong practitioners.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 127.1 million (July 2014 estimate). A 2012 report by the government's Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) indicates that membership claims by religious groups totaled 197 million. This number, substantially more than the country's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is common for practitioners of Buddhism to participate in religious ceremonies and events of other religions such as Shinto. (Shinto is an indigenous religion of Japan.)

According to the ACA's statistics, religious organizations reported 100 million Shinto followers, 85 million Buddhists, and 1.9 million Christians, while nine million followed other religions. The category of "other" includes Islam, the Bahai Faith, Hinduism, and Judaism.

The indigenous Ainu people, who mainly practice an animist faith, were once concentrated in northern Honshu and Hokkaido, though many now live in the

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greater Tokyo area. Most immigrants and foreign workers practice religions other than Buddhism or Shinto.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion for all, and says that the state shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity. It states that the people shall not abuse these and other rights therein, and the people shall be responsible to use these rights for the public welfare.

The law states that schools established by the national and local governments must refrain from religious education or other activities in support of a specific religion. It also states that an attitude of religious tolerance and general knowledge regarding religion and its position in social life should be valued in education.

Regulations stipulate that worship shall not be prohibited for inmates in penal detention facilities. Labor law states that a person cannot be disqualified from union membership on the basis of religion.

According to the ACA, approximately 182,000 religious groups are certified as religious groups with corporate status by the central government and prefectural governments. The large number reflects local units of religious groups registering separately. The government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification, but certified religious groups receive tax benefits.

The law provides the government with some authority to supervise certified religious groups. The law requires certified religious groups 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 group's for-profit activities if the group violates these regulations.

Government Practices

The government granted temporary humanitarian protective status to Chinese individuals who were Falun Gong (also referred to as Falun Dafa) practitioners. The temporary humanitarian status allowed Falun Gong adherents to remain in the country and to travel overseas using travel documents issued by the government.

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The government issued temporary stay visas to Muslims who came to Japan saying they faced ethnic and religious persecution in Burma. Most of these individuals have resided in Japan more than five years, and some for more than 15 years. Some reportedly entered the country illegally and were not associated with any formal resettlement program. The temporary visas required frequent renewal. While temporary status carries some legal risk of deportation, no one was deported to Burma. Embassy officers met with representatives of the majority-Muslim Rohingya population who reported the Japanese government's reluctance to grant refugee status to Rohingyas fearing religious persecution in Burma.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Members of the Unification Church (UC) continued to report abductions. In its July 14 observations on Japan's sixth periodic report, The United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concern about reports of abductions and forced confinement of converts to "new religious movements" by members of their families in an effort to deconvert them. The committee called on the government to "take effective measures to guarantee the right of every person not to be subjected to coercion which would impair his or her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief."

While the number of reported abductions and forced deprogramming cases involving UC members has declined sharply since the 1990s, the UC and the nongovernmental organization Human Rights Without Frontiers International stated that abductions and forced deprogramming of UC members by their non-UC family members continued to occur. The UC reported nine cases in which 10 church members were abducted. In these cases, UC members either received notification directly from the abductees or visited the members' homes after they went "missing," and then contacted police in six cases. According to the UC, family members released from forced confinement nine of the members, including two released after five days following intervention by local authorities. Five of the released abductees subsequently withdrew from the church. The tenth detained member remained in "confinement" at year's end.

In February media reported that 31 municipal libraries found that 265 copies of *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank had been vandalized. In March a suspect was arrested, but prosecutors dropped the charges after the individual was deemed mentally incompetent to stand trial. A week after the arrest, the prime

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minister visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam to express regret over the vandalism.

In December the *Sankei* newspaper published an advertisement for three anti-Semitic books that deny the Holocaust and link responsibility for the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2011 earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster, among other human tragedies, to the Jewish people or the state of Israel. After the Simon Wiesenthal Center lodged a protest with the president of the newspaper, *Sankei* issued a letter of apology from its president to the center. Two days later, the newspaper published an apology to its readers and the Jewish community.

Significant interfaith efforts continued during the year. In February an inter-faith marathon relay race that included Buddhist, Shinto and Muslim followers was held in Kyoto Prefecture. Ten teams of 40 persons participated in the race and held a prayer for world peace.

On August 4, the 27th annual Religious Summit Meeting, an interfaith prayer event to promote world peace, was hosted by Tendai Buddhists on Mount Hiei in Shiga Prefecture. Approximately 1,000 Buddhist, Christian, and Shinto practitioners from around the world gathered for the event.

In November the Ukrainian Orthodox church held an ecumenical memorial service in remembrance of the Holodomor famine with Catholic and Anglican participants.

Members of the Islamic Center continued to speak at churches and participated in interfaith peace prayers with Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy closely monitored the status of religious freedom, conducted outreach to minority religious groups, including UC and Falun Gong practitioners, and NGOs, and discussed religious freedom with the government, including law enforcement officials.

Embassy representatives met with a variety of faith-based groups and religious leaders. On June 30, the Ambassador hosted an iftar for members of the Muslim community to promote religious tolerance. Embassy officers met with Jewish community leaders to learn more about the community's outreach efforts, and with members of Soka Gakkai, a Japanese religious movement rooted in Buddhism, to

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discuss their public education and social work agenda. U.S. consulates general also engaged with religious communities in their districts.