

TAJKISTAN 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right individually or jointly to adhere to any or no religion, and to freely choose and act in accordance with one's religion. The law, however, prohibits persons under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities, and the government enforced the ban. Women from the majority Hanafi Sunni Muslim community remained barred from attending religious services by a fatwa issued by the Council of Ulema, the country's highest body of Islamic scholars, but those of other denominations and religious groups were permitted to do so. The government arrested individuals suspected of involvement with religious groups it termed "extremist," and continued to express concern over religious groups it perceived as representing a threat to social order. The government closely monitored the registration of religious groups, suspending the activities of mosques found in violation of registration requirements and reinstating operations once mosques fulfilled registration requirements. Protestant church leaders complained of harassment by security services, and the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) continued to deny the registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses and one local Protestant church. The government continued to exercise strict control over religious publications and religious events.

There were reports of societal discrimination based upon religion, such as the harassment of a Christian student on account of his faith and anecdotal evidence of other religious minorities being criticized about their practices.

The U.S. Ambassador, other embassy staff, and visiting U.S. government officials met with government officials, including CRA members, and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom, including restrictions upon minors and women participating in religious services, harassment of local Protestant churches, the attempts of Jehovah's Witnesses to regain registration, convictions on grounds of religious extremism, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) prison access to persons jailed for religious extremism, and restrictions on religious education, the wearing of religious attire, and the publication and importation of religious literature. In June visiting senior U.S. government representatives discussed religious freedom with officials of the CRA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Section I. Religious Demography

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The U.S. government estimates the total population is 8.1 million (July 2014 estimate). According to local academics, the population is more than 90 percent Muslim. The majority adhere to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam as traditionally practiced in Central Asia. Approximately 4 percent of Muslims are Ismaili Shia, the majority of whom reside in the remote Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region located in eastern Tajikistan.

There are Christians and small numbers of Bahais, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews in the country. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox; there are also Baptists, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, and Korean Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right, individually or jointly, to adhere to any or no religion and freely choose and act in accordance with one's religion.

There is no official state religion, but the government recognizes the "special status" of Hanafi Sunni Islam.

The CRA is the main body overseeing and implementing all religious laws. The Center for Islamic Studies, under the president's executive office, monitors religious issues and helps formulate the government's policy toward religion.

The law on parental responsibility prohibits persons under 18 years from participating in public religious activities, including attending the Hajj, with the exception of funerals. With written parental consent, the law allows minors between the ages of seven and 18 to obtain a religious education in their free time outside of school classes and the state education curriculum, and to worship as part of educational activities at religious institutions.

By law all religious groups must register with the government to operate. The CRA oversees this process. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force a place of worship to close, and fine each member from 280-400 somoni (\$53-\$75) for first time offenders, 480-800 somoni (\$91-\$151) for repeat

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offenders, 800-2,000 somoni (\$151-\$377) for religious group leaders, and 400-16,000 somoni (\$75-\$3,019) for illegal entities. The government maintains a list of banned groups it considers extremist, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, al-Qaeda, Muslim Brotherhood, Taliban, Jamaat Tabligh, Islamic Group (Islamic Community of Pakistan), Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, Islamic Party of Turkestan (former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan – IMU), Lashkar-e-Tayba, Tojiksitoni Ozod, Sozmoni Tablighot, Salafiya, Jamaat Ansarullah, and Group 24.

The law restricts Muslim prayer to four locations: mosques, cemeteries, homes, and shrines. The law on religion regulates registration, size, and location of mosques, limiting the number of mosques that may be registered within a given population area. “Friday” mosques, which conduct prayers five times per day as well as the larger Friday prayers, are allowed in districts with populations of 10,000 to 20,000 persons; “five-time” mosques, which conduct only daily prayers, are allowed in areas with populations of 100 to 1,000. In Dushanbe, Friday mosques are allowed in areas with 30,000 to 50,000 persons, and five-time mosques are allowed in areas with populations of 1,000 to 5,000. The religion law allows one “central Friday mosque” per district or city, and makes other mosques subordinate to it. Mosques function on the basis of their self-designed charters in the buildings constructed by appropriate religious communities or citizens, or with the assistance of the population. The law stipulates that imam-*khatibs* (religious leaders who preach sermons and conduct weekly Friday prayers), and imams be selected by “the appropriate state body in charge of religious affairs.”

The religion law requires that all institutions or groups wishing to provide religious instruction first obtain permission and register with the CRA. Only central district mosques may operate madrassahs for high school graduates. Other mosques, if registered with the government, may operate religious schools for younger students. Parents may teach religious beliefs to their children in their homes, provided the child expresses a desire to learn. The law forbids religious homeschooling outside the immediate family.

The law provides criminal penalties for violating restrictions on sending citizens abroad for religious education, preaching, and teaching religious doctrines, and establishing ties with religious groups abroad without CRA consent. The law also provides penalties for religious groups that engage in activities contrary to the purposes and objectives set out in their charter, and makes the CRA responsible for handing down fines for such offenses.

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A 2004 Council of Ulema fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques remains in effect, reinforcing official government policies regarding women praying in mosques. The fatwa states that, according to the country's Islamic traditions based on the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, women should pray at home. Women of other traditions, such as Ismaili Shia and Christians, are not subject to the Council of Ulema's prohibition.

A 2012 City of Dushanbe public disturbance regulation, which prohibits the use of external loudspeakers for *azan* (the Islamic call to prayer) in the city's mosques if residents in the vicinity of the mosque complain to city authorities, remains in effect. Loudspeakers, however, remain in use for *azan* in many areas of Dushanbe.

The law regulates private celebrations, including weddings and Mavludi Payghambar (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), and funeral services. The law limits the number of guests, eliminates engagement parties, and controls ceremonial gift presentations and other rituals. The religion law reiterates these principles, mandating that "mass worship, religious traditions, and ceremonies should be carried out according to the procedure of holding meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and peaceful processions prescribed by law."

Government Practices

There were reports of detentions and imprisonment of individuals on religious grounds. The government broadly interpreted its authority to restrict religious activity to protect constitutional order, territorial integrity, security, public order, health, and public morality, as well the rights and freedoms of others. The government asserted its authority to approve any religious activity in order for such activity to be considered legal. The nominally independent Council of Ulema issued fatwas and religious guidance to Islamic religious groups.

Human rights organizations stated that among the list of groups banned by the government as "extremist" were several minority Muslim groups. During the first half of the year, security and law enforcement officers detained 25 individuals accused of membership in banned organizations and suspected of committing 12 crimes under extremism laws. Of these 25, 18 were allegedly members of Salafiya movement, four were allegedly members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and two were allegedly members of Jamaat Tabligh. Approximately 95 members of Jamaat Tabligh and an unknown number of Salafiya adherents remained imprisoned for religious activities.

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On September 22, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction of 11 members of the banned Salafiya group for organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Seven members of the group received sentences of three years' imprisonment, and four others were fined 60,000 somoni (\$11,321) each. The court convicted the group's leader, Karim Davlatov, of organizing a criminal group and sentenced him to 10 years of imprisonment.

On August 18, law enforcement officials announced they had detained five individuals in the southern district of Farkhor on suspicion they were involved in the Salafiya group. Authorities reportedly detained the five men as they were attempting to spread Salafist ideology in the Farkhor District central market. An official from the Farkhor District Department of Religious Affairs told journalists the detainees had long attracted the attention of security services with what the official called "suspicious behavior," including praying differently at the mosque, ignoring traditional Hanafi Islam rules and procedures, and acting contrary to sharia.

In the first such case against a law enforcement officer, on May 9, media reported authorities detained police captain Sharif Mirakov under suspicion of membership in the Salafiya group. On August 27, local media reported that the Khatlon Regional Court began hearings after the conclusion of a three-month investigation into the case. Authorities charged Mirakov with inciting religious hatred after approximately 10 local citizens accused him of engaging in "unhealthy" religious discussions which caused enmity among locals.

There were several instances of State Committee of National Security (GKNB) officials interrogating Jehovah's Witnesses in Dushanbe. According to Jehovah's Witnesses representatives, GKNB officials summoned three local Jehovah's Witnesses to their facilities in Dushanbe on July 4. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives stated that the GKNB insulted, humiliated, and intimidated the three individuals into signing self-incriminating statements that they were "Jehovah's Witnesses who spread their faith to others acting according to directions of American Jews to the discord of society." Officials justified the detentions and interrogations of the Jehovah's Witnesses by declaring their worship services illegal. Officials added they would not permit the Jehovah's Witnesses to register again.

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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious organizations stated that authorities sometimes refused to register religious groups, often on technical or administrative grounds. Without registration, such groups risked criminal or civil penalties for continuing to operate. Domestic and international NGOs stated that both registered and unregistered religious communities faced raids, surveillance, detentions, and forced closures of religious institutions. As of July there were 72 registered non-Muslim religious groups.

During the year the CRA approved 23 applications to create a religious organization. During a January 14 press conference, CRA officials stated the CRA approved 135 out of 416 applications for registration submitted by religious associations in 2013. Of the 135 approved applications, three were central Friday mosques, 10 were Friday prayer mosques, and 122 were five-time prayer mosques. The CRA refused 238 applications for failure to conform with legal requirements for registration as a religious association.

During the year, the government closed at least two unlicensed madrassahs, “temporarily suspended” the activities of 128 mosques which were not registered with the CRA, and allowed 44 mosques whose activities had been suspended to resume their activities.

On February 21, media reported that Komiljon Fayzov, imam-*khatib* at a five-time mosque in Kulob, was under suspicion of illegal religious teaching and inciting religious hatred. According to a national television report, Fayzov operated an illegal madrassah in the mosque, teaching the basics of Islam to individuals aged 12 to 30 years old. During a search of the mosque, authorities found more than 300 copies of religious materials, the majority of which they stated did not correspond with generally accepted Hanafi Islam beliefs. Fayzov responded that the materials were for his personal use and that he taught the students only text from the Quran. The criminal investigation of Fayzov was ongoing at year’s end.

State television reported that, during an early June raid, Hissor District Department of Religious Affairs authorities discovered an unofficial madrassah in Hissor operated by Hakimali Nizomov, also known as Qori Abdulhakim. Authorities opened a criminal investigation against Nizomov under sections of the criminal code dealing with prevention of obtaining basic compulsory education, causing physical or mental suffering, and bigamy or polygamy. According to media reports, Nizomov taught the basics of Islam to more than 80 children from three to 18 years old at the madrassah, which was located in four residential buildings near

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Nizomov's residence. Parents reportedly paid Nizomov 300 somoni (\$57) for their children to attend his classes. The education program was put together by the owner himself and covered the basic tenants of Islam. In addition, television reports showed bruises on the bodies of younger madrassah students who were allegedly beaten by Nizomov's older students. Reports also stated that the school failed to meet sanitation standards.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to press the CRA to reconsider its refusal, since 2004, to register the religious group. At year's end the CRA had not responded to Jehovah's Witnesses' meeting requests or made a decision on the pending registration application. On January 30, the CRA returned the Jehovah's Witnesses registration documents for a second time, citing the absence of an address confirmation letter from the local administration. On August 4, the Sino District administration approved the Jehovah's Witnesses' application for confirmation of the legal address of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Dushanbe. On August 8, Jehovah's Witnesses representatives submitted registration documents to the CRA for the third time, and requested a follow-up meeting with CRA officials to discuss their pending application for registration. During a November 2013 meeting with a representative of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania and local representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, CRA Chair Abdurahim Kholikov had suggested that local representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses should submit registration documents under a new name, the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Dushanbe. In December 2013 the CRA initially returned the registration documents, requesting minor modifications to the organization's charter, which the Jehovah's Witnesses made before resubmitting the registration documents.

Leaders of local Christian churches reported that GKNB officers visited their churches, warned them not to allow children to attend religious services, and threatened to charge pastors with "religious and political" crimes if they continued to operate unregistered churches.

On January 8, Sughd Regional Department of Religious Affairs officials reported that 24 mosques in the region, whose activities officials had suspended, had resumed their activities. CRA officials said they had suspended the activities of mosques which were operating without registration or had submitted registration applications with late, incorrect, or missing documents. Once the mosques submitted the correct documents, Department of Religious Affairs officials allowed the mosques to reinstate their activities.

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On February 11, CRA officials reported that 11 new mosques had registered in January, including one Friday mosque and 10 five-time mosques.

In February the Kulob Regional Department of Religious Affairs temporarily suspended the activity of 20 mosques located in Kulob District, citing a “lack of proper documentation.” According to an official, the mosques were located in public buildings not approved for religious services. Local authorities stated that the mosques would be allowed to reopen as soon as they submitted the required paperwork. Concurrently, Khatlon officials fined eight unlicensed imams in these mosques 280 somoni (\$53) each.

There were reports of authorities banning religious expression or practice. On July 24, local media reported that a special commission of Khujand city officials had been inspecting Khujand mosques since the beginning of the year in order to verify their compliance with the requirements of a law governing religious organizations. As of August, the commission had inspected 26 out of 48 mosques and had suspended the activities of two mosques it found to be illegally operating in buildings not approved for religious activities. The committee filed administrative violation documents against the organizers of the “illegal” mosques.

During the first half of the year, officials levied a total of 3,865 somoni (\$729) in fines on 22 people for praying in an unsanctioned area. Over the same period, officials initiated 157 administrative cases against individuals for illegally teaching religious beliefs, levying a total of 44,760 somoni (\$8,445) in fines.

According to the CRA, 158 citizens were illegally studying religion in Islamic countries. In total, 3,054 citizens of the country were found to have illegally received religious education abroad; 2,896 of them voluntarily returned at the completion of their studies. The CRA requires that students have completed a higher education degree domestically and be enrolled at an officially registered university abroad in order to receive permission to study religion abroad.

According to media reports, four imam-*khatibs* in Kulob District left their positions July 15 after they used electronic devices to identify *qiblah* (the direction of Mecca, which Muslims face during prayers). It was unclear if they left their positions voluntarily. A Kulob Regional Department of Religious Affairs official told reporters that “arbitrary innovations” in identifying *qiblah* caused confusion and inconsistency among congregation members. A commission of Council of

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Ulema members and imam-*khatibs* determined that the imam-*khatibs* could not sufficiently justify departing from the traditional method of identifying *qiblah* and said their actions were professionally untenable.

On August 14, Kulob Regional Department of Religious Affairs head Sharif Abdulhamidov told reporters that since mid-July his department had officially granted 20 mosques in Vose District the right to operate. These mosques previously had been operating without government registration. Abdulhamidov stated that another 26 mosques in Vose District continued to function without government registration. He said, despite the threat of suspension and fines, mosque leaders were slow to submit required registration documents.

At a January 14 press conference, CRA officials stated that the CRA had published a manual of sermon topics for Friday mosques which it would distribute to central Friday mosques and Friday mosques throughout the country. The 300-page manual includes 45 sermon topics promoting peace and tolerance, supported by relevant quotations from the Quran and from scholars of the Hanafi faith. A CRA official told media that imam-*khatibs* had asked the CRA to create a book to assist them in preparing Friday prayers. Although CRA representatives regularly emphasized during meetings with clergy that use of the manual was not mandatory, media reports stated some experts believed the CRA was using the manual to assert additional control over imam-*khatibs*. According to a May 8 media report, imam-*khatibs* from more than 10 Friday mosques in Dushanbe confirmed they had not yet received the manual, but received weekly brochures from the CRA with Friday sermon themes.

On January 1, the CRA began paying Muslim clerics a monthly salary of 800-1,000 somoni (\$151-\$189), depending upon their position. Beginning in March the CRA also approved a robe for clerics to wear while performing official duties, and subsidized 25 percent of the robe's cost.

Mosques generally enforced the 2004 Council of Ulema fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques. Many imams stated they believed they would face problems with the government if they allowed women to attend their mosques. On January 14, head of the Council of Ulema Saidmukarram Abdulqodirzoda told journalists that the Council of Ulema issued the fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques because mosques lacked the proper facilities for women to pray separately from men. For example, he said, most mosque buildings were single-story with only one entrance. Abdulqodirzoda stated that the Council of

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Ulema would repeal the fatwa if mosque facilities were modified to allow men and women to enter and pray separately from each other. Civil society contacts indicated that some Sunni Hanafi women were interested in praying in congregations, but faced obstacles due to the government's prohibition on unauthorized religious gatherings.

During the year the Council of Ulema maintained its interpretation of sharia limiting beard lengths for men to no larger than the size of a fist and stating that women's clothing should cover the entire body except for hands, face, and feet.

On February 12, the Islamic Center of Tajikistan, a supervisory body including the Council of Ulema and representatives from central Friday mosques throughout the country, which is considered to be the country's highest Hanafi Sunni Islam authority, issued a fatwa stating that only clergy members may lead funeral or memorial prayers. This fatwa supersedes any conflicting last wishes of the deceased or his/her family. According to the fatwa, its purpose was to avoid disputes during memorial services which undermine the authority of religious leaders. Media widely reported a January incident between respected religious figure and former *imam-khatib* Eshoni Nuriddinjon and active *imam-khatib* Jamoliddin Amonullozoda over who would read the prayers during a funeral ceremony. The family of the deceased had asked Nuriddinjon to read the prayers, but Amonullozoda said that he should read the prayers, as the *imam-khatib* of the mosque where the ceremony was held.

On January 21, CRA officials told media that mosque leaders had installed video cameras in all 365 Friday and central Friday mosques across the country, and in all 51 five-time mosques in Dushanbe. The process of security camera installation in mosques began in 2012 with the stated purpose of ensuring the safety of believers. CRA officials explained that in rural areas they had installed video cameras only in Friday mosques, because rural five-time mosques lacked the finances to purchase and install cameras. CRA officials stated they intended to install video cameras in rural five-time mosques in the future.

On June 11, a Sughd Regional Department of Religious Affairs official told reporters that the five madrassahs, whose activities had been suspended since June 2013, were scheduled to resume their activities by September 1. The Sughd Regional Department of Religious Affairs created a special working group to develop curricula and determine educational standards for the madrassahs to enable them to obtain a license from the Ministry of Education (MOE). In addition

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to religious subjects, the newly developed curriculum was to include vocational training. According to the official, authorities at the madrassah in Khujand had prepared all the necessary documents to receive a license from the MOE, and authorities at the remaining madrassahs were preparing the necessary documents to obtain a license in time to resume their activities at the start of the academic year. None of the madrassahs, however, had received licenses from the MOE by the end of the year.

On February 1, CRA representatives announced to the media that a commission consisting of the chair of the CRA, the head of the Council of Ulema, and other CRA officials conducted certification exams for imam-*khatibs* of several Friday mosques, as well as the heads of district and city departments of religious affairs. The purpose of these exams was reportedly to ensure imams understand religious law and practice and related legislation. Exam questions covered national legislation, sharia, and other relevant laws.

On May 13, a Kulob Regional Department of Religious Affairs representative informed journalists that a commission consisting of CRA officials, local Council of Ulema representatives, and imam-*khatibs* from 57 Friday mosques planned to meet with more than 500 members of the clergy in the south of the country. The commission was charged with certifying that imam-*khatibs* possessed a minimum understanding of the tenets of Hanafi Sunni Islam, including how to conduct public prayers. According to the CRA officials, the CRA would ask mosque founders to remove imam-*khatibs* who failed to demonstrate the necessary level of understanding of Hanafi Sunni Islam from their positions and nominate other people for the position.

In February the Islamic Center of Tajikistan started giving two-month courses for head imams at Dushanbe Friday mosques to improve their knowledge of Hanafi Islam. During his remarks to attendees of the twice-weekly sessions, head of the CRA Kholikov addressed the spread throughout the country of “unwanted,” non-Hanafi Sunni Muslim traditions which were perceived as causing disagreements among Hanafi Muslims.

The MOE oversaw implementation of legal provisions related to religious instruction in schools. Islamic education could be provided only at Islamic institutions. The MOE approved the rector, faculty, and all programs of study at the Islamic Institute of Tajikistan, the only Muslim higher education institution in

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the country. The government inspected the curricula at madrassahs and periodically monitored classes.

The country's only synagogue remained unregistered, since the Jewish community was not large enough to meet formal registration requirements. The government, however, permitted the community to worship without interference. The synagogue is located in a building the government provided in 2010, after authorities destroyed the previous synagogue to build new government buildings.

The government tightly controlled the publication, importation, and distribution of religious literature. Religious groups could produce, export, import, and distribute an unspecified "proper number" of religious literature materials. This, however, required the advance consent of the appropriate state authorities. Only religious organizations were entitled to establish enterprises that produce religious literature and materials with religious content. Religious literature and materials for religious purposes produced by religious organizations had to indicate the full name of the religious organization.

The government placed numerous restrictions on religious materials and publications. Authorities levied heavy fines on the "production, export, import, sale, and distribution of religious literature" without permission from the CRA. The law provides for violators to be fined up to 2,800 somoni (\$528) for individuals, 6,000 somoni (\$1,132) for government officials, and 12,000 somoni (\$2,264) for legal entities. The government charged a fee per page to "review" religious literature before granting this permission. Government-owned media outlets did not regularly publish religious literature but on occasion published copies of the Quran in Tajik.

Officials inspected bookstores, newsstands, kiosks, markets, and mosques, and confiscated unregistered religious materials. Vendors were allowed to sell basic Islamic texts, including the Quran, the Hadith, the history of the Prophet, and prayer books. The government, however, did not permit vendors to sell Shia literature, texts considered "non-Hanafi," or audio and video disks featuring prominent Tajik imams. Foreign religious movies, the sale of which the government had previously restricted, were available during the year.

Media and religious groups reported that authorities seized religious literature from Muslims, Protestants, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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On February 26, media reported that representatives of the CRA, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and the state-owned Tojik kino film enterprise jointly raided the Korvon Market in the Firdavsi District of Dushanbe. A CRA official stated that they checked all stalls selling books and audiovisual products, and confiscated a total of 1,342 audio and video discs with religious content not approved by the CRA. Nur Studio produced the illegal videos in Tajiki, Uzbek, and Arabic. Law enforcement officials charged the vendors with an administrative violation and levied fines from 2,000-4,000 somoni (\$377-\$755).

Some women and girls who wore hijabs were discriminated against by government officials and denied access to public facilities. Enforcement was particularly rigid in schools.

The government did not permit school and university students to wear hijabs. The MOE dress code did not permit teachers under the age of 50 to have a beard.

On May 29, a teacher at a Rudaki District school scolded fifth grader Shukrona Davlatova for wearing the hijab to an after-school class and asked her to take the hijab off. Davlatova's parents told journalists the teacher scared her to the point that she swallowed a pin from her headscarf that she had been holding in her teeth while attempting to remove the hijab.

The CRA regulated participation in the Hajj based on Saudi Arabia's annual quota. It collected applications and fees for participation in the Hajj and made all flight and hotel arrangements in Saudi Arabia. More than 6,000 citizens performed the Hajj during the year. The fee to participate in the Hajj was 18,165 somoni (\$3,655). NGOs noted that individuals who deviated from government-authorized Muslim practices and organizations were denied permission to perform the Hajj.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

At least one Christian student in a Dushanbe elementary school was harassed by fellow students on account of his religious beliefs. Some members of minority religious groups, particularly among the Ismaili community, expressed concern about an increase in societal intolerance towards their community members on an individual basis. Religious leaders and religious freedom experts cited the lack of formal training among many religious leaders in religious studies as a contributing factor to the increase in societal intolerance towards people who held different beliefs.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and other government representatives frequently engaged with government officials on religious freedom issues, including during the June visit of the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs and a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. In addition, embassy and visiting U.S. officials regularly met with representatives of religious groups, civil society, and government bodies, including the CRA, to discuss specific issues of religious freedom, including issues of reregistration of some non-Muslim religious groups. Embassy officials raised concerns about restrictions upon minors and women participating in religious services, harassment of local Protestant churches, the attempts of Jehovah's Witnesses to regain registration, convictions on grounds of religious extremism, ICRC prison access to persons jailed for religious extremism, and restrictions on religious education, the wearing of religious attire, and the publication and importation of religious literature. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom cases with diplomatic colleagues to coordinate efforts on monitoring cases and raising concerns with government officials.