

INDIA 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom; however, some laws and policies restricted this freedom. The country is a secular republic, with all religions equal under the law. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. Some state governments enforced existing "anti-conversion" laws, and some local police and enforcement agencies in certain instances failed to respond effectively to communal violence, including attacks against religious minorities.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The country is the birthplace of several religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and for thousands of years, home to Jewish, Zoroastrian, Muslim, and Christian communities. At times, violence between religious groups and organized communal attacks against religious minorities occurred. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reported that incidents of communal violence continued at about the same rate as last year. The country's democratic system, independent legal institutions, vibrant civil society, and free press provided mechanisms that helped to address violations of religious freedom when they occurred.

The U.S. government continued to promote religious freedom in the country. During meetings with senior government officials, as well as state and local officials and religious community leaders, senior U.S. officials discussed religious freedom issues, including reports of harassment of minority groups and missionaries, and redress for victims of the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2011 census, the total population is 1.21 billion. According to the 2001 census, the latest year for which disaggregated figures have been released, Hindus constitute 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, and Sikhs 1.9 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 1 percent of the population include Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Bahais. So-called "tribal" groups, which are indigenous groups historically outside the caste system and generally included among Hindus in government statistics, often practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs (animism).

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There are large Muslim populations in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala; Muslims constitute the majority in the states of Jammu and Kashmir. Although Muslims are a minority nationally, the country has the world's third-largest Muslim population based on the 2001 census. Slightly more than 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni; most of the rest are Shia. Christian populations are found across the country but in greater concentrations in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs constitute the majority in the state of Punjab.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom; however, authorities at times limit this freedom by maintaining or enforcing existing state-level “anti-conversion” legislation and other laws that infringe on religious freedom and the rights of minorities.

Under the National Commission for Minorities Act, five religious communities – Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, and Buddhists – are considered minority communities. This law provides that the government will protect the existence of these religious minorities and encourage conditions for the promotion of their individual identities.

There are active “anti-conversion” laws in five of the 28 states: Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh's 1978 anti-conversion law remains on the books but unimplemented due to a continuing lack of enabling legislation. Authorities generally explain these laws as protective measures meant to shield vulnerable individuals from being induced to change their faith. For example, the Gujarat law proscribes religious conversions through “allurement, force, or fraud.” In 2009 civil rights groups brought a constitutional challenge to the Gujarat laws, but the Gujarat High Court had yet to hear the case by year's end.

Under Himachal Pradesh law, no “person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any

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such conversion.” Violations are punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment and/or a fine of 25,000 rupees (\$625), with increased penalties if “Scheduled Caste” or “Scheduled Tribe” members (socially marginalized groups) or minors are involved. In the past, the law required a “Notice of Intention” to be filed 30 days before any act of conversion, except for acts of reconversion. However, in August, the Himachal Pradesh High Court voided this provision and two other state rules supporting it after the Evangelical Fellowship of India petitioned to challenge the provision. Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh maintain similar prohibitions against conversion by force or enticement.

Odisha law also prohibits religious conversion “by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.” Penalties include imprisonment, a fine, or both, and are harsher if the offense involves minors, women, or a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe member. The law also requires that district magistrates maintain a list of religious organizations and individuals propagating religious beliefs, that individuals provide notification prior to conversion, and that clergy declare their intent to officiate in a conversion ceremony.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) regulates foreign contributions to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including faith-based NGOs. The Ministry of Home Affairs specifies that an application for foreign funding can be rejected under the FCRA if the association is found to be creating communal tensions or disharmony, or if accepting foreign contributions might be prejudicial to “harmony between any religious, social, linguistic, or regional group, caste, or community.”

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) empowers the government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, are involved in terrorism or sedition, or violate the FCRA. Local authorities on occasion rely upon certain sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to arrest persons engaged in activities deemed offensive to other groups or religions. For example, one provision of the law prohibits “promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion...and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.” Another provision prohibits “deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.”

There are no requirements for registration of religious groups; however, the government requires foreign missionaries of any religious group to obtain a “missionary visa” and usually expels those who perform missionary work without

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the appropriate visa. There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs.

Under Andhra Pradesh law, authorities may prohibit the propagation of one religion near a place of worship or prayer of another religion. Thus far, the state has identified only Hindu religious sites for this protection. Punishment for violations of the act can include imprisonment for up to three years and fines up to 5,312 rupees (\$125). A fact-finding team from the National Commission for Minorities found that the prohibition was not in line with the constitution's protections of freedom of religion, noting that the IPC had provisions sufficient to deal with offenses committed in places of worship.

The constitution provides that Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism are considered subsets of Hinduism; however, these groups view themselves as distinct faiths and have sought legislation to change this provision. Sikhs have sought passage of a law that recognizes their uniqueness and precludes ambiguity. Although the 1992 National Commission for Minorities Act identifies Buddhism as a separate religion, the Supreme Court in 2005 rejected the inclusion of Jainism under the act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as minorities should be discouraged. However, in June 2008, the Delhi state government accorded minority status to the Jain community. Jains also have minority status in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and West Bengal. According to press reports, state governments have the power to grant minority status to religious groups designated as minorities under the 1992 act, but not all states have officially done so. The states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka recognize Sikhs as minorities.

There are different state laws only applicable to certain religious communities (known as "personal laws") in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. The government grants a significant amount of autonomy to personal status law boards in crafting these laws. Hindu law, Christian law, Parsi law, and Islamic law are legally recognized and judicially enforceable. None is exempt from national and state level legislative powers or social reform obligations as stated in the constitution.

A law passed by the parliament on May 20 permits Sikhs to register their marriages under the Anand Marriage (Amendment) Act of 1909 instead of the Hindu Marriage Act. The Anand (term for Sikh weddings) Marriage Act provides Sikhs partial recognition and allows separate registration of Sikh marriages;

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however, there are no divorce provisions for Sikhs and other Sikh matters still fall under Hindu codes. Previously under the Hindu Marriage Act, Sikhs faced problems abroad when they claimed their faith since their marriage certificates said they were Hindus.

The government permits private religious schools, but not religious instruction in government schools. The government may prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding. Other religious schools may use their own criteria for admission, including religious affiliation.

Approximately 30,000 Islamic schools operate in the country and provide full or part-time education. Most do not accept government aid, noting that it would subject them to government influence.

The law generally provides remedies for violations of religious freedom, and legal protections exist to address discrimination or persecution by private individuals. Federal bodies including the Ministry for Minority Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the National Commission for Minorities may investigate allegations of religious discrimination. There is also a National Commission for Minority Education Institutions that has the power to investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights in the education system, and the right to establish and administer educational institutions. These bodies make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them and the two federal bodies have intervened in several high profile incidents.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday and Christmas (Christianity); the two Eids (Islam); Lord Buddha's Birthday (Buddhism); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikhism); Dussehra, Diwali, and Holi (Hinduism); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jainism).

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including arrests and detention. The government generally enforced legal protections for religious freedom; however, human rights activists criticized it for at times failing to respond effectively to abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens. Authorities at times limited religious freedom by implementing some restrictive laws and by not efficiently or effectively prosecuting those who attacked religious

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minorities. There were reports of arrests but no convictions under the “anti-conversion laws” during the year.

There were reports of arrest and harassment of religious minorities. Authorities invoked several sections of the IPC in a manner that resulted in restricting these minorities’ freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Officials typically claimed that information in pamphlets or discussions at gatherings were injuring the religious sentiments of others, who were often members of the majority religious group.

On March 13, a mob of approximately 20-30 persons attacked four Jehovah’s Witnesses who were sharing their religious message with individuals in Vidya Nagara, Shimoga. One victim was taken to the hospital for treatment of his injuries, while another was detained at a police station and jailed overnight before posting bail the following day. The police registered a complaint against him for insulting religious sentiments; the case remained pending at year’s end.

In August in the Masoori area of Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh, five Muslim youths were killed when police allegedly opened fire on an angry mob protesting the desecration of a Quran in Delhi.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of authorities arresting persons under state-level “anti-conversion” laws. Maulvi Yusuf Khan Pathan and Altaf Mirza, arrested in December 2011 under Gujarat’s Freedom of Religion Act for not seeking permission to convert a Hindu woman before her 2010 marriage to Mirza, were freed on bail in January (Mirza) and March (Pathan). Police had not filed charges by the end of the year.

There were several reports during the year of state authorities arresting Christian missionaries accused of proselytizing. For example, on March 26, media reported that police arrested four Christians in Cheechgaon, Madhya Pradesh after other villagers complained that the four tried to induce others to convert. The four were subsequently released on bail, and police had not filed charges as of the end of the year.

On February 11, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court ordered the police to nullify a criminal complaint against Pastor Chander Mani Khanna, arrested in November 2011 for alleged forced conversions. As police were unable to gather enough evidence of “conversion by allurement” against Khanna, the case was subsequently dropped.

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On October 29, in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, three Hindu youths – Kishori Sharma, Bansi Lal and Moti Lal Sharma – were charged with desecrating religious symbols and inciting communal hatred using information technology for allegedly uploading a video deemed blasphemous onto Facebook. After over 40 days in custody, the accused were granted bail on December 12, and the charges against them remained pending at year's end.

There were allegations of police abuses during the year. In several instances of communal attacks on religious minorities and their property, police reportedly arrested victims of such attacks, and NGOs alleged there were instances in which police protected the attackers rather than the victims.

In March in Mumbai, the Catholic Secular Forum and an individual filed police complaints against Sanal Edamuruku, an atheist-rationalist, for “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.” Edamuruku publicly challenged claims that water dripping from a Jesus statue in a Catholic Church in Mumbai was a miracle, and alleged that priests manipulated followers through contrived claims of miracles. In July, Edamuruku asked a Delhi court to quash the complaints against him, but the court declined and instructed Edamuruku to report to the police for investigation into the complaint. Instead, Edamuruku fled the country. The police had not filed formal charges against him by year's end.

NGO activists alleged authorities implemented FCRA in an arbitrary manner that allowed foreign funds to flow to Hindu religious organizations but cut off foreign funding to Christian groups. Some religious organizations, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, complained that government implementation of FCRA prevented them from financing humanitarian and educational activities.

In 2000, the Home Affairs Ministry prohibited the Jehovah's Witnesses from receiving foreign contributions after finding that the group posed a “serious threat to the public peace and tranquility” and that their activities would “disturb religious harmony.” The community's legal challenge to this ruling has been pending before the High Court for 11 years, and remained pending at year's end.

During the year, media reported several educational institutions in Mangalore, Karnataka, banned Muslim girls from wearing headscarves. Since 2009, schools and colleges run by both Hindu and Christian administrations have prevented

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Muslim female students and teachers from covering their heads, citing a uniform dress code.

The government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contained material the government deemed inflammatory and apt to provoke communal or religious tensions. Most bans on books imposed during previous years remained in effect.

Low-caste individuals who converted from Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism were forced to forfeit access to certain affirmative action benefits. The law reserves a set number of places in higher education institutions and government jobs for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Under the constitution, however, only Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists can be members of Scheduled Castes; members of other religions are considered to be outside the caste system. Human rights groups argued that economically and socially disadvantaged people who chose to convert should not be further disadvantaged on the basis of their choice of religion. There was minimal progress in a court case filed by Christian groups in 2004 demanding that Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to reservations for government jobs and subsidies as other Scheduled Castes. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court in 2010, but had not been ruled on by the end of that year; during the year, the Court asked the government to submit its response.

The government of Andhra Pradesh classified Ahmadi Muslims as non-Muslims and declared that it would not consider any property owned by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to be Muslim. Ahmadi Muslims were also not allowed to sit on the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, a body of religious leaders that the central government recognizes as representative of Indian Muslims.

Government Inaction

The law was not always enforced rigorously or effectively in some cases of religious violence, and prosecution continued to be weak. These shortcomings were exacerbated by a low police-to-population ratio, corruption, and an overburdened court system. Despite government efforts to foster communal harmony, ineffective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators led to delayed justice, although numerous cases were being pursued in the courts at the end of the year. There were concerns in civil society that a perceived failure to bring those responsible for communal violence against religious minorities to justice contributed to a climate of impunity.

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During several incidents in Karnataka during the year, local authorities either acted in coordination with, or failed to stop, members of a Hindu nationalist organization, Hindu Jagarana Vedike (HJV), from entering private residences to enforce a morality code based on their interpretation of Hindu traditions, including a desire to keep Hindu and Muslim youths from fraternizing. NGOs alleged that the state government often failed to intervene in such attacks out of sympathy for the HJV's aims. On July 28, HJV members stormed a birthday party near Mangalore, Karnataka, and attacked young men and women attendees for allegedly drinking and dancing. The assailants invited the media to record their attack. Police subsequently arrested several of the attackers as well as two reporters. One reporter remained in custody at year's end. In a report on the case to the state's deputy chief minister, the Karnataka State Women's Commission Chairperson made no mention of the HJV involvement and instead blamed the partygoers for the violence.

NGOs reported that a group of Hindu nationalists attacked a group of Christians gathered for a baptism ceremony in Khantapada, Odisha on October 2. Following the alleged attack, officers from the Khantapada police station arrested 20 of the Christian parishioners, who were later released without charge.

Hyderabad and several other towns in Andhra Pradesh witnessed sporadic attacks on religious minorities and their properties during the year. In March, in Sanga Reddy, Medak District, mobs attacked and burned down Muslim properties in a wave of attacks and counterattacks between Hindus and Muslims following allegedly inflammatory Internet postings. NGOs expressed concern that police failed to take timely and effective actions to halt the violence.

Civil society activists continued to express concern about the Gujarat government's failure to arrest those responsible for communal violence in 2002 that resulted in the killing of more than 1,200 persons, the majority of whom were Muslim, and displacement of over 250,000 people. Media reports indicated some Muslims still feared repercussions from Hindu neighbors as they waited for the court cases to be resolved.

In 2002 the Gujarat government appointed the Nanavati-Mehta Commission to investigate the violence. On December 31, the term of the commission was extended for the 20th time, with the final report on the 2002 Gujarat communal violence due on June 30, 2013. Several victims have made accusations that the Special Investigation Team (SIT) that the Supreme Court appointed in March 2008

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pressured them to dilute their earlier testimony before the Nanavati-Mehta Commission. In many of the cases tried in Gujarat's lower courts, the accused were acquitted due to a lack of evidence or changes in the testimony.

Trial courts in Gujarat gave rulings in the Naroda Patiya case, Dipal Durwaja case, and Ode cases during the year. In these verdicts, as well as the earlier Godhra verdict in February 2011, and Sardarpura verdict in November 2011, Gujarat courts sentenced 11 to death and nearly 145 to long prison sentences for the burning of a train and subsequent anti-Muslim violence. The most notable among the sentences was that of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) politician and former minister Maya Kodnani, who was sentenced to 28 years in jail for her role in the Naroda Patiya killings. Decisions in the Naroda Gam and Gulberg Society cases remained pending at year's end. Prosecutors have appealed all judgments to the Gujarat High Court, and those appeals remained pending at year's end.

In September 2011, the Supreme Court asked a magistrate court in Gujarat to probe whether Chief Minister Narendra Modi and 60 others could be prosecuted for their role in the riots. Zakia Jafri, a survivor of the Gulberg Society killings, has tried since 2006 to register a complaint against Modi and the 60 others for complicity in the communal violence. In May the magistrate court ruled that the Special Investigation Team (SIT) must turn over all the evidence it collected to Jafri. At year's end, Jafri and the SIT continued arguing before the Supreme Court about what evidence is still due to Jafri.

Hundreds of other court cases stemming from the 2002 violence (which were not in the purview of the SIT) remained pending.

On September 27, a Delhi court decided to hear the plea of Resham Singh, a U.S. citizen who has alleged former Congress Party leader Jagdish Tytler instigated the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. The court hearing was to have taken place on November 9 but was postponed. In September a Delhi court resumed hearings in the trial against Congress Party leader Sajjan Kumar and five others for their alleged role in 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and the trial remained ongoing at year's end.

The NHRC had not submitted by year's end a report on the status of cases related to 2008 violence in Kandhamal, Odisha, which erupted after the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his aides. According to NGO activists, of the 3,232 total complaints filed by alleged victims, police had registered 828 cases. At year's end, courts had convicted 464 defendants in 74 separate cases and acquitted 2,445 people in 172 additional cases. There were

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2,677 cases still pending trial, and police declined to pursue 248 other cases due to lack of evidence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Many incidents were linked to politics, conversion, retaliation, or economic competition for scarce resources among religious communities. In November the MHA reported 560 cases of communal violence which led to 89 deaths and 1,846 injuries between January and October. In Uttar Pradesh alone, there were over 100 communal clashes during the year, leaving 34 dead. In 2011, there were 580 instances of communal violence, which killed 91 and injured 1,899 persons. Because ethnicity and religion are often linked, it remained difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

The BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and other affiliated Hindu nationalist organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) publicly claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups; however, the RSS opposed conversions from Hinduism and expressed the view that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values, which they claimed were the country's values.

Conversion of Hindus or members of lower castes to Christianity remained highly sensitive and occasionally resulted in assaults and/or arrests of Christians. Hindu nationalist organizations alleged that Christian missionaries lured low caste Hindus in impoverished areas with offers of free education and health care, and these organizations equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians stated that low caste Hindus converted of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "reconvert" these new Christians to Hinduism were accompanied by offers of remuneration and thus fraudulent.

A series of clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh began in Pratapgarh in March and continued in Mathura in June, where two people were killed, and ended with incidents in Bareilly in July and August.

In August some hard-line Muslim groups attacked the statues of Lord Buddha and Lord Maharani in Lucknow in addition to instigating violence in Kanpur and Allahabad over a controversial anti-Islam Internet video.

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Independent media reported that approximately 95 minority-owned shops were torched by a Hindu mob on October 25 in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh. Approximately a dozen minority community houses were also gutted. At the end of the year, police were still investigating the incidents.

A report released by the Catholic-Christian Secular Forum on January 10 reported 14 incidents in Maharashtra of attacks against Christians by the majority Hindu community during 2011. For example, on January 6, 2011, Hindu extremists beat three missionaries in a busy area of Kolhapur city while they were allegedly distributing Christian literature. The police had made no arrests in this case by the end of the year.

Communal riots erupted on October 24 in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, during a Hindu religious festival celebrating the goddess Durga. Law enforcement reported that clashes between Hindus and Muslims began after rumors that a statue of the Hindu goddess Durga had been vandalized. During the violence two people were killed and thousands of dollars' worth of property was damaged.

There were also instances of intra-Muslim conflict. For example, on March 25 in Hyderabad, approximately 200 members of an extremist Muslim group called Majlis Tahaffuz Khatm-e-Nubuwwat attacked an Ahmadiyya mosque at Saidabad, breaking windows and resulting in minor injuries to several persons in the building. The police quickly dispersed the mob.

While the number of attacks on Ahmadi Muslims decreased compared to previous years, in May, Kashmir's grand cleric Mufti Muhammad Bashir-ud-din demanded that Ahmadi Muslims in Kashmir be called non-Muslims. Many mainstream Muslim groups continued to refuse recognition to Ahmadis as Muslims. Over half-a-dozen Sufi shrines were either attacked or damaged in Kashmir between June and August. Tensions in Kashmir remained high following a suspicious fire on June 25 that destroyed the 245-year-old Peer Dastgeer shrine. An investigation into the incident continued at year's end. Other shrines were also damaged in incidents during the year. On June 29, rioters torched Alam Sharief and desecrated a Quran on the outskirts of Srinagar. From July 16 to 17, Hazrat Syed Sahab was damaged in a fire at Konibal-Awantipora in the south Kashmir district of Pulwama. A police investigation was ongoing at year's end.

There were efforts by some groups to limit the wearing of Muslim garb. The All India Students Council led the demand for banning hijabs and burqas.

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There were reports that low-caste Hindus and Christians, particularly in rural areas, were denied access to places of worship by members of higher castes and some community leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and consulate officials raised religious freedom issues with relevant national and local government officials. U.S. officials also met with leaders of all significant religious communities to discuss religious freedom and interfaith issues. In August members of the consulate general staff in Mumbai showed films and visited local schools to give presentations on religious diversity in the United States. The American library in Mumbai produced and distributed information on “Religious Diversity in the United States” with emphasis on devotion and tolerance.

During the year the ambassador held an iftar in New Delhi which included several dozen influential members of the Muslim community as well as non-Muslim political and social leaders. The Mumbai consul general hosted two interfaith iftars, one in Mumbai with approximately 120 participants and one in Ahmedabad with 100 participants. Mission officers were active in hosting a dozen additional iftars around the country for nearly 1,000 guests. These activities reached approximately one million people through various forms of media.

Staff from the consulates general in Kolkata and Chennai met with a range of Muslim leaders to discuss tolerance and strengthen relationships following the September protests against an anti-Islamic video posted on the Internet. The Department of State’s special representative to Muslim communities spoke to an audience of several hundred. She gave an interview in an Urdu-language newspaper which reached an audience of up to one million and focused on the need for better communication between different religious groups.

Embassy and consular officials engaged Islamic schools and other educational institutions directly and through exchange programs on topics such as religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Embassy officers and speakers reached out to Muslim-oriented universities on numerous occasions. The consulate general in Hyderabad also facilitated a visit to the consulate general of students who were attending an interfaith summer camp organized by a prominent Muslim interfaith group. The visit helped students understand the U.S. government’s commitment to freedom of religion.