

## *Documentation*

# **Freedom of religion guaranteed, Religious rights well-protected**

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The Information Office of the State Council yesterday released a white paper on freedom of religious belief in China. The following is the full text of the paper:

## **I. The present conditions of religion in China**

China is a country with a great diversity of religious beliefs. The main religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Citizens of China may freely choose and express their religious beliefs, and make clear their religious affiliations. According to incomplete statistics, there are over 100 million followers of various religious faiths, more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, some 300,000 clergy and over 3,000 religious organizations throughout China. In addition, there are 74 religious schools and colleges run by religious organizations for training clerical personnel.

Buddhism has a history of 2,000 years in China. Currently China has 13,000-some Buddhist temples and about 200,000 Buddhist monks and nuns. Among them are 120,000 lamas and nuns, more than 1,700 Living Buddhas, and 3,000-some temples of Tibetan Buddhism and nearly 10,000 Bhiksu and senior monks and more than 1,600 temples of Pali Buddhism. Taoism, native to China, has a history of more than 1,700 years. China now has over 1,500 Taoist temples and more than 25,000 Taoist priests and nuns.

Islam was introduced into China in the 7th century. Nowadays in China there are 10 national minorities, including the Hui and Uygur, with a total population of 18 million, whose faith is Islam. Their 30,000-odd mosques are served by 40,000 Imams and Akhunds. Catholicism was introduced into China intermittently in the 7th century, but it was not spread widely until after the Opium War in 1840. At present, China has 4 million Catholics, 4,000 clergy and more than 4,600 churches and meeting houses.

Protestantism was first brought to China in the early 19th century and spread widely after the Opium War. There are about 10 million Protestants, more than 18,000 clergy, more than 12,000 churches and 25,000-some meeting places throughout China.

China has the following national religious organizations: Buddhist Association of China, Taoist Association of China, Islamic Association of China, Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, Chinese Catholic Bishops' College, Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Protestant Churches of China, and China Christian Council.

Religious leaders and leading organs of the various religious bodies are selected and ordained in accordance with their own regulations. Religious organizations in China run their own affairs independently and set up religious schools, publish religious classics and periodicals, and run social services according to their own needs. As in many other countries, China practices the principle of separating religion from education; religion is not a subject taught in schools of the popular education in China, although some institutions do teach or conduct research into religion. The various religious schools and institutes set up by the different religious organizations teach religious knowledge in line with their own needs. All normal clerical activities conducted by the clergy and all normal religious activities held either at sites for religious activities or in believers' own homes in accordance with usual religious practices, such as worshipping Buddha, reciting scriptures, going to church, praying, preaching, observing Mass, baptizing, monkhood initiation, fasting, celebrating religious festivals, observing extreme unction, and holding memorial ceremonies, are protected by law as the affairs of religious bodies and believers themselves and may not be interfered with.

The "cultural revolution" (1967-1976) had a disastrous effect on all aspects of the society in China, including religion. But in the course of correcting the errors of the "cultural revolution" government at all levels made great efforts to revive and implement the policy of freedom of religious belief, redressed the unjust, false or wrong cases imposed on religious personages, and reopened sites for religious activities. Since the 1980s, approximately 6000 Protestant churches have been reopened or rebuilt each year in China. By the end of 1996 more than 18 million copies of the Bible had been printed, with special tax exemption treatment to speed their publication. In addition, more than 8 million copies of a hymn book published by the China Christian Council in 1983 have been distributed. From 1958 to 1995, a total of 126 Catholic bishops were selected and ordained by the Chinese Catholic Church itself. In the past dozen years more than 900 young Catholic priests have been trained or consecrated by Chinese Catholicism. More than 3,000 Protestants attend the Sunday service at Chongwenmen Church in Beijing each week. The Beijing Nantang Catholic Cathedral observes Mass four times each week with an attendance of more than 2,000. Of these, one Mass is held in English specially for foreigners in Beijing.

In the course of the country's long history, the various religions in China have become part of the traditional Chinese thinking and culture. It is traditional for Chinese religious believers to love their country and religions. The Chinese Government supports and encourages the religious circles to unite the religious believers to actively participate in the construction of the country. The various religions all advocate serving the society and promoting people's well being, such as the Buddhists "honouring the country and benefiting the people," the Catholics and Protestants' "glorifying God and benefiting the people," the Taoists "being benevolent, peaceful and harmonious, saving the world and benefiting the people", and Islam's "praying to Allah to give great reward in this world and hereafter."

In China all religions have equal status and co-exist in tranquillity. Religious disputes are unknown in China. Religious believers and non-believers respect each other, are united and have a harmonious relationship. This shows, on the one hand, the influence of traditional Chinese compatibility and tolerance, and, on the other, the fact that since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the Chinese Government has formulated and carried out the policy of freedom of religious belief and established a politico-religious relationship that conforms to China's national conditions.

## **II. Legal protection of the freedom of religious belief**

Chinese citizens' right to the freedom of religious belief is protected by the Constitution and laws.

In the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, freedom of religious belief is a basic right enjoyed by all citizens. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief." It also goes on to say, "No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion." Again, "The State protects normal religious activities" and "no one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State." In addition, "religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination."

China's Law on National Regional Autonomy, General Principles of the Civil Law, Education Law, Labour Law, Compulsory Education Law, Electoral Law of the People's Congresses, Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees, advertisement Law and other laws stipulate that all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, have the right to vote and stand for election; the legitimate property of religious bodies is subject to legal

protection; education is separate from religion, and all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, enjoy equal educational opportunities in accordance with the law; the peoples of all ethnic groups should respect each other's languages, customs and habits, and religious beliefs; citizens shall not be discriminated against in terms of employment because of different religious beliefs; and no advertisement or trade marks shall include discriminatory contents against any ethnic group or religion. The Chinese Government has promulgated the Regulations on the Administration of Sites for Religious Activities so as to protect the lawful rights and interests of such sites. The regulations specify: Sites for religious activities shall be run independently by the administrative organizations thereof, whose lawful rights and interests and normal religious activities at the sites shall be protected by law. No organization or individual may violate or interfere with such rights, interest or activities. Anyone who encroaches on the lawful right and interest of the sites for religious activities shall bear legal responsibilities. Religious activities conducted at the sites, however, must conform to laws and regulations.

The Chinese Government has promulgated the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China. China respects the freedom of religious belief of aliens within Chinese territory and protects their friendly contacts and cultural and academic exchanges with Chinese religious circles with respect to religion. Aliens may participate in religious activities at recognized sites for religious activities within Chinese territory. They may also preach at the invitation of Chinese religious bodies at or above the provincial level. Aliens may hold religious activities attended by aliens at sites approved by people's governments at or above the county level. They may invite Chinese clerical personnel to conduct such religious rituals as baptisms, weddings, funerals and prayer meetings, and may bring with them printed religious matter, audio visual religious material and other religious articles for personal use while entering Chinese territory. Aliens who conduct religious activities within Chinese territory shall abide by Chinese laws and regulations.

The legal protection of citizens' right to the freedom of religious belief in China is basically in accordance with the main contents of the concerned international documents and conventions in this respect. The following stipulations in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and the Vienna Declaration and Action Programme are all included in China's laws

and legislation in explicit terms and are being put into practice: that freedom of religion or belief is a basic human right; people should enjoy freedom of religion or belief; no one should be discriminated against because of religious affiliation or belief; people should enjoy freedom of religious service and assembly, and the freedom to set up and maintain places of worship; they should have the freedom to compile and distribute printed materials pertaining to religion or belief; they should have the freedom to celebrate religious festivals and hold religious rites based on their faith and morals; and they should have the right to promote and protect the rights pertaining to only a small number of people ethnically, racially, religiously and linguistically. According to Chinese laws, while all citizens enjoy the right to freedom of religious belief they must also carry out duties prescribed by law. In China, all individuals and organizations, including all religions, must safeguard the people's interests, the sanctity of the law, ethnic unity and unification of the nation. This is in conformity with the relevant clauses of the UN documents and conventions on human rights. The Declaration on the Elimination of All forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief states: "Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights notes: "Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law." Citizens who believe in religion and those who do not believe in religion are equal before the law. This is a basic requirement for modern civilization and nations subject to the rule of law.

Each country has its own history, culture and national conditions, which decide that each country's protection of freedom of religious belief has its own characteristics. While stressing the protection of freedom of religious belief, China pays equal attention to the protection of the freedom not to believe in religion, thus ensuring freedom of religious belief in a complete sense. This is a more complete and more comprehensive protection of citizens' basic rights. The Chinese Government maintains that religious belief is a citizen's personal affair. However, the construction of a prosperous, powerful, democratic modern socialist country with advanced culture, and the safeguarding of the country's sovereignty and national dignity are the common goals and in the fundamental interests of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, including those who believe in a religion and those who do not. Therefore the people who believe in religion and those who do not can unite and co-operate politically and respect each other's beliefs.

Religion should be adapted to the society in which it is prevalent. This is a universal law for the existence and development of religion. Now the Chinese people are building China into a modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese Government advocates that religion should adapt to this reality. However, such adaptation does not require citizens to give up religious belief, nor does it require any religion to change its basic doctrines. Instead it requires religions to conduct their activities within the sphere prescribed by law and adapt to social and cultural progress. This conforms to the fundamental interests of religious believers as well as to those of the various religions themselves.

Nevertheless, since the 1980s some pernicious organizations have sprung up in certain areas of China, which engage in illegal and even criminal activities under the signboard of religion. Some of the heads of these pseudo-religions distort religious doctrines, create heresies, deceive the masses, refuse to obey the State's laws and decrees, and incite people to overthrow the government. Some pretend to be supernatural beings, and have killed or injured people; others organize promiscuity, or defraud people of money or property. They are a serious danger to the normal life and productive activities of the people. The broad masses of the people and personages of the religious circles detest this phenomenon, and so, in order to safeguard the public interest and the sanctity of law and to better protect the people's right to freedom of religious belief and normal religious activities, China's judicial organs punish in accordance with the law law-breakers and criminals who severely endanger society and the public interest. The punishment of criminals by China's judicial organs in accordance with the law has nothing to do with religious belief. No one in China is punished because of his or her religious belief. But no country that practises the rule of law in the world today would tolerate illegal and criminal activities being carried out under the banner of religion.

### **III Judicial and administrative guarantees and supervision of the freedom of religious belief**

With respect to judicial guarantee, China stipulates clearly the penalties for the infringement of citizens' right to freedom of religious belief. For instance, article 251 of the Criminal Law states: "State personnel who unlawfully deprive citizens of their freedom of religious belief and infringe upon the customs and habits of minority ethnic groups, when the circumstances are serious, are to be sentenced to not more than two years of fixed-term imprisonment or criminal detention." In the Decisions on the Standards for Filing Directly Received Cases of Infringement upon Citizens' Democratic and Personal Rights and Those of Malfeasance, it is stipulated that a people's procuratorate shall place on file

a case in which a State functionary illegally deprives anyone of his or her legitimate freedom of religious belief -- such as by interfering in normal religious activities, forcing a believer to give up his/her membership of a religion or compelling a citizen to profess a certain religion or adherence to a certain religious sect -- and in which the offense is of an abominable nature and has brought about serious consequences and undesirable effects. A people's procuratorate shall also put on record cases of illegally closing or destroying lawful religious sites and other religious facilities. In recent years the Chinese judiciary, in accordance with the law, has tried several cases infringing upon relevant laws of the State and seriously hurting the religious feelings of certain believers, and has meted out punishments to persons responsible for the offenses.

With respect to administrative guarantee, governments at different levels have set up religious affairs departments to administer and supervise the implementation of the laws and statutes pertaining to religion and to put the policy ensuring the freedom of religious belief into effect. These departments shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations and sites.

In China religious organizations and sites for religious activities must register with the government in accordance with the law, which is the case in some other countries as well. Applications for such registration must meet the following basic requirements: a permanent site and name; regular attendance; a management organization composed of adherents to the relevant religion; clerical personnel for officiating religious activities or personnel with qualifications stipulated in regulations of various religions; management regulations and lawful income. Government departments shall defer the registration or only approve temporary registration of religious sites which cannot completely satisfy these basic requirements or have prominent management problems. Government departments shall not permit the registration of, for example, sites for religious activities which illegally occupy land or violate the statutes of city planning, which have been set up without authorization or which promote superstitious activities, such as exorcising evil spirits under the pretext of religious activities. Once a site for religious activities is registered according to law it has legal status and its lawful rights and interests shall be protected. If its rights and interests are infringed upon, the organization in charge of the site is entitled to seek administrative and legal protection by appealing to the relevant government organ or taking the case to a people's court. There is no registration requirement for, to quote from Chinese Christians, "house services" which are mainly attended by relatives and friends for religious activities such as praying and Bible reading.

People's congresses at different levels, which are organs through which the people exercise their power, and the Chinese people's political consultative conferences at different levels, which are playing an important role in the political and social life of the State, shall supervise the implementation of the policy and laws relating to the freedom of religious belief. There are about 17,000 religious personages who are deputies to people's congresses or members of political consultative conferences at different levels. On behalf of religious circles they participate in the discussions of important State and social affairs at the people's congresses and political consultative conferences, and offer comments, suggestions and criticisms, or submit proposals and motions relating to the government's work on religion. During the three years from 1993 to 1996 alone, the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council heard and responded to more than 50 motions proposed by deputies to the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

#### **IV. Support for independence and initiative in management of religious affairs.**

China's religious affairs are handled by the various religious bodies, their clergy and followers themselves. China's religious affairs and religious bodies are not subject to any foreign domination. The Chinese Government supports the management of religious affairs by the various religions themselves according to the Constitution and laws.

The principle of independence and taking the initiative in their own hands in the management of churches is a historical choice made by the Chinese religious believers of their own accord as part of the Chinese people's struggle against colonialist and imperialist aggression and enslavement. Following the Opium War of 1840 China declined into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country.

During this process Western Protestantism and Catholicism were used by colonialism and imperialism as a tool for aggression against China, and a number of Western missionaries played an inglorious part in this.

They participated in the opium trade and in plotting the Opium War unleashed by Britain against China. In the 19th century Robert Morrison, a British missionary and Karl Friedrich August Gutz, a Germany missionary, both working for the East India Co., participated in dumping opium in China.

Some missionaries strongly advocated resort to force by Western powers to make the Qing government open its coastal ports, saying that it was only war that could open China to Christianity, and directly participated in the British military activities to invade China.

They participated in the war of 1900 launched by the allied forces of eight powers against China. A number of missionaries, serving as guides, interpreters and information officers, took part in the slaughter of Chinese civilians and the robbing of money and property.

According to Mark Twain, the renowned American writer, some of the missionaries imposed on the poor Chinese peasants fines 13 times the amount they were supposed to pay, driving their wives and innocent children to lingering death from starvation, so that they were thus able to use the money gained through such murder to propagate the Gospel.

They directly took part in plotting and drafting unequal treaties, such as the Sino-British Treaty of Nanking of 1842, the Sino-American Treaty of Wanghsia of 1844, the Sino-American and Sino-French treaties of Tientsin of 1858 and the Sino-French Convention of Peking of 1860.

According to the unequal treaties, Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries could lease land for building their own places of worship in trade ports and enjoyed the protection of local officials; missionaries could also freely lease or buy land for construction and other purposes in the provinces; local Chinese officials must treat them kindly and protect those missionaries who came to inland regions to preach their religions; Chinese officials must not impose prohibitions on Chinese who professed a religious faith; etc.

They enjoyed extraterritoriality, and were not governed by China's laws. The western powers gave their missionaries in China protection on the strength of the consular jurisdiction they enjoyed.

Taking advantage of extraterritoriality some Western missionaries, backed by the aggressive imperialist forces, went to inland China to build churches and set up parishes.

They forcibly occupied land and bullied and oppressed Chinese officials and civilians. These missionaries even willfully extended the extraterritoriality to Chinese converts and interfered in Chinese judicial authority.

They strengthened the control of the Western powers over China on the pretext of "religious cases" -- conflicts and disputes between Chinese people and the Western missionaries who incurred popular indignation by doing evil deeds under the protection of the unequal treaties.

In the period between 1840 and 1900, some 400 such cases occurred in China. On the pretext of these religious cases the Western powers imposed military and political pressure on the Chinese Government.

They put forward various unreasonable demands, compelled the Chinese Government to pay indemnities, and arrested and executed innocent people. Moreover, they even launched aggressive wars on such a pretext.

In a case in Tianjin in 1870 alone, the Western powers compelled the Qing government to execute 20 people and exile 25.

They obstructed and opposed China's struggle against fascism and the Chinese people's revolution. After Japan invaded Northeast China, the Vatican Romana took a stand which was, in fact, supporting the Japanese aggression.

It took the lead in recognizing the puppet Manchukuo regime set up by the Japanese and sent a representative there. After the victory in the War of resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937-45), some Western missionaries stirred up hostility against the people's revolution among the converts and even organized armed forces to help the Kuomintang fight in the civil war.

They adopted a hostile attitude toward New China and plotted sabotage. After the founding of New China in 1949, the Vatican issued papal encyclicals several times instigating hatred against the new people's political power among the converts.

While playing an inglorious role in modern Chinese history, Western Catholicism and Protestantism manipulated and controlled Chinese churches turning them into appendages to Western religious orders and mission societies.

Under the circumstances Chinese clergymen and the vast majority of their followers had no rights. In the 1940s among the 20 archbishops in China there were 17 foreigners and only three Chinese; in the 143 dioceses there were some 110 foreign bishops but only about 20 Chinese bishops.

Some Chinese Christians early expressed their wish to cast off such control and began establishing their own independent Christian organizations.

However, in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal old China it was absolutely impossible for Chinese churches to maintain real independence and realize self-management.

The founding of the People's Republic of China put an end to the era of semi-colonial and semi-feudal society in China, thus providing the historical conditions for Chinese Catholicism and Protestantism to become independent and self-managing.

In July 1950, 40 leading figures from various religious denominations head by Wu Yaozong published the "Three-Self Declaration," titled "The Way in Which Chinese Christianity Works for New China's Construction," expressing the attitude of Chinese Christians who supported New China, and their determination to cast off imperialist influence and achieve the "Three Selves" (self-administration, self-support and self-propagation) of Chinese churches.

In September 1950, 1,527 leading Christians signed the declaration. Three or four years later the number of Christians who had signed the document reached more than 400,000, about two-thirds of the total number of Christians in the country. Christians have since then adhered to the principles of the “Three-Selfs”.

In November 1950, more than 500 Catholics in Guangyuan County, Sichuan, published the Declaration on the Catholic Reform Movement of Self-Support, advocating cutting off the relationship with imperialism in all aspects and setting up new churches on the basis of self-administration, self-support and self-propagation.

The declaration was welcomed by the leading Catholic clergymen and other converts in all parts of China. Though the Vatican took repeated political actions of hostility against New China, the Chinese church reported the appointment of one acting bishop and two full bishops, selected in 1957 and 1958, to the Vatican.

However, the Vatican refused to recognize them threatening to mete out extraordinary punishments, greatly hurting the feelings of the Chinese Catholics. Since then the Chinese Catholic Church has firmly taken the way of selecting and ordaining its own bishops and independently managing the churches.

In religious belief Chinese Catholicism is the same as Catholicism anywhere else in the world, while in church administration all the internal affairs are handled according to decisions made by the Chinese Catholic Church independently.

In the past few decades Chinese Protestantism and Catholicism have stuck to the principles of independence and self-management, which have met with assent and support from the vast majority of believers and enabled the church and its religious activities to develop soundly.

Now the total number of Chinese Christians is 14 times as many as in 1949. Chinese Catholicism has 115 dioceses under the direction of Chinese bishops or priests.

While adhering to the principles of independence and self-administration, Chinese religions are active in making exchanges and contacts with their counterparts all over the world on the basis of equality and friendship.

China is always open to foreign religious organizations and individuals who are friendly to China, respect China’s sovereignty and Chinese religions’ principles of independence and self-administration. China’s Protestantism and Catholicism have maintained friendly contacts with churches in many countries.

In February 1991, the Chinese Christian Council officially joined the World Council of Churches. The Chinese Catholic Church has sent

representatives to attend some international religious conferences successfully, such as the 5th World Conference on Religion and Peace and the World Catholic Youth Day.

In recent years Chinese churches have sent quite a number of students to study abroad and invited foreign lecturers and scholars to teach in China's theological seminaries. Friendly international exchanges are also increasing in the areas of China's Buddhism, Taoism and Islam.

The Chinese Government has consistently adhered to a peaceful foreign policy of independence and taking initiative in its own hands, and is willing to improve the relations with the Vatican.

However, such improvement requires two basic conditions: First, the Vatican must end its so-called diplomatic relations with Taiwan and recognize that the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legal government in China and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory

Second, the Vatican must not interfere in China's internal affairs on the pretext of religious affairs. In the first place, the relationship between China and the Vatican is one between two countries.

Therefore, only when the relations between the two countries improve can religious issues be discussed. Whether the relations between China and the Vatican change or not, the Chinese Government will, as always, support Chinese Catholicism which holds aloft the banner of patriotism, sticks to the principles of independence and self-management, and stands for selection and ordination of bishops by itself.

## **V. Protection of the right to freedom of religious belief for ethnic minorities**

China is a united country of many ethnic groups. The Chinese Government pursues a policy of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all the ethnic groups, respects and protects the right to freedom of religious belief and the folk customs of the ethnic minorities.

The Law of the People's Republic of China on National Regional Autonomy stipulates: "Organs of self-government in ethnic regional autonomous areas protect the right to freedom of religious belief of the citizens of all ethnic groups."

While making great efforts to promote progress in economy, culture, education and other undertakings in the areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities, so as to improve the material and cultural well-being of the broad masses of the ethnic minorities (including believers in various religions), the Chinese Government pays special attention to their religious beliefs and protection of their cultural heritages.

Special programmes have been carried out to survey, collect, classify, study and publish the cultural heritages - including religious cultures - and folk arts of all the ethnic groups. In addition, the State has made huge investments in the maintenance and reconstruction of temples, mosques and other religious facilities of important historical and cultural value in ethnic minority areas.

Tibet is one of China's ethnic autonomous regions and the Tibetans mostly believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951, and particularly since the introduction of the reform and opening policies in 1979, citizens' rights to freedom of religious belief have been thoroughly carried out in Tibet.

Since the 1980s the central government has allocated more than 200 million yuan (\$24 million) in special funds for the maintenance and reconstruction of the famous Potala Palace and Jokhang, Tashilhunpo and Samye monasteries.

The State has also established special funds to support the work of compiling and publishing the Tripitaka in the Tibetan language and other major Tibetan Buddhist classics as well as the work of establishing the Advanced Buddhism College of Tibetan Language Family of China in Beijing and the Tibet College of Buddhism in Lhasa.

At present, there are in Tibet over 1,700 places for Buddhist activities and a total of 46,000 resident monks and nuns. Small prayer halls or shrines are virtually universal in the homes of believers, and pilgrims coming to Lhasa number well over 1 million each year.

Believers performing Buddhist rituals, and prayer umbrellas and Mani rocks carved with Buddhist sutras can be found all over the Tibet Autonomous Region.

In addition, religious activities during the annual Sholton Festival and the traditional practice of circling Mount Kangrinboque in the Year of the Horse and circling Lak Namoo in the Year of the Sheep along pilgrim paths have been carried on and respected by society at large.

The reincarnation of holy men, or "Living Buddhas," is a unique form of succession in Tibetan Buddhism which has long been recognized and respected by the State.

In 1992 the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council approved the succession of the 17th Karmapa Living Buddha.

In 1994 China successfully concluded the search for the identification of the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama and the title-conferring and enthronement of the 11th Panchen Lama after lot-drawing from a golden urn according to the established religious rituals and historical conventions of Tibetan Buddhism, and with the approval of the State Council.

These actions highlight the fact that the Tibetan people's right to religious freedom is respected and protected, thus winning endorsement and support from the converts of Tibet.

Considering the special place of the Grand Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism of past generations in Tibetan social life, the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties gradually put the identifying of the reincarnation of the Living Buddhas within the jurisdiction of the central government and into the framework of the State's laws and statutes.

In 1792 the Qing government issued an order that the reincarnation of the Grand Living Buddhas above the Hutuktu rank be determined through drawing lots from the golden urn, which later developed into a historical institution and was accepted as a permanent religious ritual in Tibetan Buddhism.

The "soul boy" confirmed through lot-drawing from the golden urn as the reincarnation of the Grand Living Buddha must be reported to the central government for approval prior to his official enthronement.

The lot-drawing may be dispensed with under special circumstances, but this must also be reported to the central government in advance for approval. The practice of lot-drawing from the golden urn not only upholds the central government's supreme authority and sovereignty of the State, but religiously displays the "decision by Sakyamuni's Dharma" as well.

Since 1792, in the reincarnation system of the Grand Living Buddha's of Tibetan Buddhism over 70 "soul boys" have been identified by confirmation through lot-drawing from the golden urn and with the approval of the central government.

Therefore, the approval of the reincarnation of the grand Living Buddhas by the central government is a religious ritual and historical convention of Tibetan Buddhism, and is the key to safeguarding the normal order of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Chinese government also respects and protects the Muslims' freedom of religious belief as well as their folk customs. The departments concerned in the government have provided special pilgrimage-related services for Muslim pilgrims, to the acclaim of the latter.

Since the 1980s the number of Chinese Muslims going to Mecca on pilgrimage has exceeded 40,000. In the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region alone, there are now more than 23,000 mosques, with 29,000 clergymen, having thus met the needs of the believers' religious life.

Out of full consideration for the dietary habits and funeral rites of those ethnic-minority people who believe in Islam, the Chinese Government has enacted regulations on the production of halal food and opened Muslims-only cemeteries.

In recent years Chinese judicial organs have provided legal protection for the lawful rights of the Muslims. Some cases concerning publications badly hurting the religious feelings of the Muslims have been handled according to law.

The Chinese Government resolutely opposes attempts to split the country along ethnic lines, and any use of religious fanaticism to divide the people, split the country or harm the unity among all ethnic groups, or engage in illegal activities and terrorist actions under the signboard of religion.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Government firmly upholds national unity and social stability in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities, and safeguards the normal religious activities of the ethnic minority believers.

The Chinese Government respects the generally accepted principles regarding religious faiths in the international community, and holds that these principles must be applied in accordance with the concrete conditions and be carried out according to the domestic law of each country.

The Chinese Government opposes creating confrontations in religion or interfering in the internal affairs of another country under the pretext of religion.

The facts make it fully clear that remarkable improvements have been achieved in the situation of human rights of the Chinese people, and the freedom of religious belief has enjoyed full respect and legal protection since the founding of New China, particularly in the recent two decades following the implementation of reform and opening policies.

The Chinese Government will, as always, make ever greater effort to safeguard human rights and specifically to protect the freedom of religious belief.

[The above translation is taken from *Xinhua*, the *China Daily*, HK edition, Fri. October 17, 1997, pp. 5-6.],