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A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Human rights study finds religious freedom concerns

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- War in the former Yugoslavia, a crackdown on unauthorized churches in China and restrictions against proselytizing in Muslim-dominated nations limited religious freedom in 1993, according to an annual report by the U.S. State Department.

The study, which assessed progress in human rights around the world, highlighted several areas of concern related to freedom of religion. They included:

-- Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a 500-year tradition of religious tolerance has dissolved in an era of "ethnic cleansing" aimed at eradicating a Muslim minority which represents 44 percent of the region's population.

In October between 25 and 50 villagers, including women and children, were killed at Štupni Dol, outside the government-controlled areas which afforded the greatest religious freedom. Early in the year Bosnian-Serb forces targeted civic and religious leaders to try to destroy Muslim society.

At least 10 international relief workers were shot and killed in 1993. Religious institutions -- nearly all mosques and Roman Catholic churches -- were destroyed or defaced.

Bosnian Muslim women complained of soldiers on both sides committing "mass rape" -- reports indicate that at least 130 young Muslim women have been confined and continually abused.

-- Croatia. Serious human rights abuses were also perpetrated in Croatia against Muslims, who make up less than 1 percent of the population.

On the Dalmatian Coast, Muslim leaders were harassed and threatened by police. Muslim shops and homes were destroyed or damaged in Dubrovnik, Split and Zagreb. Massive influx of refugees from Bosnia dramatically increased the number of Muslims and the hostilities toward them. Nearly 200 Muslims arbitrarily were denied citizenship.

The Republic of Croatia declared independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991. Under law all religions are equal and separate from the state. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity are the largest groups.

Religion is so closely tied with ethnicity, however, that warring parties have targeted religious institutions. For example, an Orthodox church was bombed. The area governor denounced the act and vowed to give aid to rebuild the church.

A majority of Orthodox clergy left at the start of the war in 1991.

Most Catholic churches in the Serbian-controlled areas were destroyed.

-- China, where concern for the rapid growth of Christian groups led to occasional government repression. In 1993, reports said, authorities tried to rein in activities of the "unapproved Catholic and Protestant movements," including raiding and closing a number of unregistered churches. In March, security officials disrupted a Protestant gathering, beating many participants -- one of whom died.

The Chinese constitution affirms toleration of beliefs, but the government restricts practice outside official religious groups.

In many areas, officials tolerate unofficial churches if they remain small and discreet.

In 1993 some religious activists were released from prison but many remain incarcerated.

-- Iraq. With an "abysmal record on human rights," Iraq closely regulates and monitors Islamic affairs with authority over places of worship, appointment of clergy, publication of religious literature and religious councils and meetings.

Despite legal guarantees of sectarian equality, the government attacks members of the Shiite faith. Iraq is less intrusive in the religious affairs of Christians, who number about 300,000. Still, Christians may not proselytize or hold meetings outside the church premises.

The Jewish community, which at its height numbered about 150,000, virtually has disappeared. A few hundred Jews remain, clustered in Baghdad.

-- Kuwait. The state religion of Islam is the undergirding source of Kuwait's laws and public policy. A tiny Arab Christian minority is allowed to practice its faith. Minority religions that are not sanctioned by the Koran, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, may worship in their homes but not publicly.

-- Morocco. A monarchy with a pluralistic political system, Morocco took steps in 1993 to address human rights concerns, but religious freedom is still limited. Islam is the official religion of the country, and conversion from Islam is prohibited. Those caught proselytizing Muslims can be imprisoned.

In October a Moroccan Muslim, Mustapha Zmamda, received a three-year sentence for continuing correspondence with a Christian radio program. A Brazilian missionary who hosted a Bible study that Zmamda attended was fired from a teaching position.

-- Turkey. Police maintained surveillance and detention of evangelical Christians. In July prosecutors urged a court to send 14 members of a Protestant sect to prison for singing hymns and passing out pamphlets outside a mosque during Muslim prayers. Charged with disturbing the peace, they were released on bail and ordered to stand trial.

-- Azerbaijan. Most Azerbaijanis are Muslim, but all religions freely practice their faith with one exception -- Armenian churches. Many Armenian churches have been vandalized in recent years and remain closed. Even if they were open, few Armenians would feel safe enough to attend worship.

-- Russia. Religious freedom continued to expand during a year of political turmoil that resulted in a newly-elected Parliament and referendum for a new constitution.

Missionaries from virtually every religion are present in Russia.

The Orthodox Church, however, has enhanced its relationship with the government, and in July it prompted the legislature to approve a new law that

would restrict the religious freedom of other faith groups. The law, vetoed by President Yeltsin, would have required all non-Russian organizations to register with the government before engaging in religious activity.

The number of clergy and places of worship remains inadequate for the population but churches continued to open in record numbers. Seminaries and other religious educational institutions expanded enrollment, and religious materials are on sale in major cities with no restrictions on the importation of religious materials.

While the government no longer condones anti-Semitism, it continues throughout various regions in Russia. Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated and rocks have broken windows of Jewish schools.

-- Georgia. Despite gains in religious freedom and worship in Georgia, representatives of the Catholic Church wait to regain buildings lost during the Soviet-era repression of religion. Those facilities were given to the Orthodox Church, and none have been returned to date.

-- Ukraine. Bureaucracy has slowed a requirement that religious groups register with local authorities in some places in the Ukraine.

Religious groups may proselytize, distribute Bibles and literature and maintain relationships with believers in other countries.

Jews, the second largest minority in the Ukraine, are discriminated against despite government statements denouncing anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic posters and literature have increased in the past year.

-- Cuba. The totalitarian state has amended its constitution to curb religious discrimination but continues religious persecution.

Religious groups must register and may hold activities at government-designated locations. Religious holidays and construction of new churches are prohibited, and churches are denied access to mass media.

The government also openly persecutes Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists.

Despite government efforts to restrict and control church activities, attendance has grown rapidly.

-- Sri Lanka. Evangelical Christians have been under attack for proselytizing followers of the state religion of Buddhism. While Christians have faced physical threats from a radical group and negative press reports, there is no evidence of "official" or state persecution.

-- Sudan. The dismal human rights picture in the Sudan saw no improvement in 1993. Muslims may proselytize freely but non-Muslims may not. A recent law makes apostasy by Muslims punishable by death -- there are no known cases in which this sentence has been carried out. Some Muslim converts, however, were harassed by local authorities this year.

Two villagers were arrested in August and imprisoned and threatened with death if they did not convert back to Islam.

-- Vietnam. Reports indicate religious groups have freedom to the extent that they cooperate with the government.

Religious leaders from all faiths have been detained, arrested and restricted by the government on political grounds. Several Catholic and Buddhist clergy remain in jail. One American citizen reported that police broke up a prayer meeting with about 30 Vietnamese and three foreigners.

-- Germany. The government does not restrict religious practice, but members of the Church of Scientology say they have been fired from jobs and expelled from political parties because of their religion.

-- Syria. Ruled by an authoritarian regime, Syria loosened exit permit issuance to Syrian Jews, released some political prisoners and ended periods of indefinite detention.

Most religious groups largely are free to practice their faith, but the government controls fund raising and construction of worship sites.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists are the exception to the government's tolerance. Those two groups are forbidden to organize or own property. Adherents to those two groups may practice their faith privately.

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Casinos come up winners  
as gambling fever hits U.S.

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Roll the dice in America today and casino gambling will come up the winner almost every time.

Gambling is predicted to be the fastest-growing industry in America in the 1990s, and casinos account for an overwhelming proportion of that growth.

The amount of money Americans wagered legally in casinos grew from \$144.8 billion in 1987 to \$240.5 billion in 1991 -- a 66 percent increase in six years.

The second major growth in the gambling industry has come in the spread of state lotteries, jumping from revenues of \$13.1 billion in 1987 to \$21 billion in 1991 -- a 60 percent increase.

Currently, Americans place about \$330 billion annually in legal bets of all kinds. That generates revenue of \$30 billion for the gambling industry after winners are paid.

Only two states -- Utah and Hawaii -- still ban all forms of gambling. Casino gambling currently is allowed in 21 states, and 15 others have casino legislation pending.

This phenomenon prompted the New York Times to declare that "the sin is indeed gone from the nation's gaming industry, obliterated by the notion of mass entertainment."

The paper reported that an intense focus on the moral issue of abortion has sidetracked the traditional critics of gambling. Further, the growth has been possible because some church groups have become dependent upon gambling for revenues themselves, the paper said.

"The spread of commercial gambling is inevitable," according to David Johnston, author of a book about casinos called "Temples of Chance." "By the end of this century almost every place in America where it has not already arrived will join the trend."

Johnston, an investigative reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, writes: "Many Americans want to gamble, and the few who object on moral grounds cannot sway elections anymore except in places like Utah."

The gambling industry has become more sophisticated and successful as it has moved from the hands of organized crime into the leadership of American business giants, Johnston contends.

"Bad as the mob is, having corporate America dominate the casino

business is worse," he writes. "The mob was limited to Nevada, and its own incompetence at managing a business as complex as casinos limited its profits."

But corporate America "has access to skilled managers and it can employ the same marketing clout that sells dandruff shampoo to push casinos and create an appearance of respectability. But licensing an enterprise does not change its nature."

The growth of the gambling industry also has fueled an increase in another statistic -- the number of teen-agers who are compulsive gamblers.

Time magazine reported in 1991 that of the estimated 8 million compulsive gamblers in America, 1 million are teen-agers.

"Just 10 years ago, teen-age gambling did not register even a blip on the roster of social ills," the magazine said. "Today gambling counselors say an average of 7 percent of their case loads involve teen-agers."

The increased availability of gambling venues hits youth hardest, Time said, because studies show teens are at least twice as likely as adults to become problem gamblers. One New York study found eight times as many gambling addicts among college students as among adults.

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Will morals appeal alone  
stop casino advances?

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Although Baptists most often oppose casino gambling on moral grounds, recent trends show that argument alone no longer pays off.

The moral argument is a "valid position" but "has become more and more a minority position over time," said William Eadington, professor of economics at the University of Nevada and director of the Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming.

"It is a valid position that does not carry as much weight as it used to," he continued. "Certainly it has been a little surprising that the South has become a hotbed of growth for casino gaming. However, the very clear trend in the United States and throughout the world right now is that gaming is becoming much more acceptable."

The declining influence of appealing to morality is confirmed by sociologist John Dombrink and political scientist William Thompson, authors of the book "The Last Resort."

The authors have studied 10 major campaigns to legalize casino gambling in the United States since 1976. In every case, religious groups opposed casinos.

"Church activity as such is not a veto factor. It alone will not defeat a campaign for casinos," they report. "But churches are a force that can trigger other veto factors."

The moral argument, in combination with other factors, can be effective in stopping casinos, Dombrink and Thompson write. For example, religious groups in Detroit formed an "unholy alliance" with horse racing interests to defeat a casino proposal in 1981.

However, that particular alliance won't be found this year in Kentucky, where the horse racing industry is the No. 1 promoter of legalizing casinos.

In an unusual twist, Kentucky's horse interests have formed a pro-casino lobbying group called Kentucky to the Front, which is lobbying the state legislature to legalize casinos gambling only at the state's nine horse tracks.

The group is headed by Tim Mulloy, a former Baptist who said he is not a gambler himself, but sees the economic incentives for legalizing casinos as far outweighing any moral concerns. The real issue, he said, is that Kentucky's tourism economy will be devastated by the growth of casinos in neighboring states.

"For us it's not a moral issue. ... The question to us is, 'Do we allow our dollars to go across the river to these states and let them get the tax benefits, the jobs.

"It is a moral issue in some ways," he added. "We have a responsibility to feed, house and clothe our families. In a perfect world, we wouldn't face this decision."

That argument doesn't wash with Claude Witt, executive director of the Temperance League of Kentucky. Witt, a member of Farmdale Baptist Church in Louisville and a trustee of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, is one of the primary forces behind Kentuckians Against Casinos, an anti-casino coalition that includes the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the Catholic Conference of Kentucky and the Kentucky Council of Churches.

"To me, gambling is gambling, whether you're talking about horse racing, bingo, casino gambling or taking a chance on a turkey," he said.

"It causes human desperation. It victimizes the poor. It contradicts social responsibility. It produces the wrong attitudes toward work. It's a sophisticated form of stealing."

In recent testimony before the House tourism committee, Witt said the Kentucky horse industry has developed an attitude of "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

"We are being asked to trust an industry to expand that is designed to profit at the expense of others," he said. "They will take money from both those who can afford the loss and those who cannot -- with the same uncaring financial success for their corporations."

Legalizing casino gambling has three negative effects on a community, Witt testified: It changes the community's character, changes the traditional culture and virtue and changes the legitimate tourism and natural attractions.

Those sentiments are echoed by Paul Jones, executive director of the Christian Action Commission, which recently lobbied unsuccessfully against casinos in Mississippi.

Government decisions to advance gambling are based on flawed reasoning, Jones said.

"You have to create a high percentage of losers to have a very small number of winners," he explained. "About 85 percent to 90 percent of the people are going to have to lose for anyone to win anything.

"The question is: 'Is it ever a legitimate function of government to legalize anything that makes its citizens losers?' "

Among the losers will be existing businesses in the state, Jones predicted. That's why Baptists should combine their moral opposition to casinos with the strength of the business community, he said.

Together, these two forces could prevent the legalization of casinos, Jones suggested.

"In Mississippi, we could only attract a couple of statewide business groups. They heard the other arguments, such as, 'We won't raise your taxes' and 'It's harmless because only the people who participate pay.'"

But Mississippi business leaders have seen a different picture now that the dice are rolling nearby, according to Jones and reports in several Mississippi community newspapers.

"Every dollar spent on gambling is a dollar not spent on legitimate business," Jones said. "When we have finally gotten to the business community in Mississippi, ... people are calling up crying and saying, 'We wish we had listened.'"

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Americans seek good health,  
'modest comfort' in '90s

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Americans in the 1990s seek "modest comfort" rather than the "power lifestyle" of the 1980s, according to pollster George Barna.

"Publicly, at least, a substantial number of Americans have forsaken the dream of attaining a 'power lifestyle,'" he said, interpreting findings of a recent nationwide poll by the Barna Research Group. "They are happy to disengage from the country's most powerful institutions and enjoy their lives on a smaller scale."

The four things Americans now say they seek the most are good health, a purpose for living, a comfortable lifestyle and close relationships, the poll found.

Good health is the thing coveted most by modern Americans, with 99 percent finding that goal "desirable" and 92 percent saying it is "very desirable."

This may explain why the debate over health-care reform is so intensely felt, Barna said. "These attitudes suggest what a minefield the Clinton Administration faces in altering the health care of Americans who are satisfied with their own personal care in order to control costs and bring care to uninsured people.

"Nothing on our list of values even comes close to good health. On the desirability scale, it is beyond even relationships with family, friends and God. You can say that Americans consider their personal health to be sacred."

Beyond good health, Americans overwhelmingly say they most desire a purpose for living, a comfortable lifestyle and close relationships with others and with God. Each of these qualities is desired by at least 92 percent of those polled.

Gone from the top of the list are highly desired attributes of the 1980s such as influence over others' lives, a high-paying job, owning a large home and achieving fame or recognition.

Today, only 79 percent say they desire influence over others' lives. A high-paying job is important to only 75 percent. Owning a large home is important to 62 percent. Achieving fame or recognition is desirable to only 35 percent.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

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