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Religion meets an iron fist

- **Doug Bandow**
- From: **The Australian**
- December 18, 2009 12:00AM

IN much of the world people are not free to worship. The list of persecutors is long; in its latest report on religious liberty, the US Department of State highlights 30 nations.

It should come as no surprise that regimes dedicated to suppressing most human liberties would seek to limit religious expression. Both communism and religion claim the whole person; they are in inherent conflict. Unfortunately, in many of these nations political repression lives on.

- **Azerbaijan:** The constitution formally protects religious liberty. But the situation has been deteriorating. Warns the US State Department, "religions considered non-traditional" are subject to monitoring and harassment, and believers can be jailed.

- **China:** The People's Republic of China remains highly suspicious of religious faith. The State Department has designed China as a "country of particular concern" because of its abusive practices.

The authorities support so-called patriotic religious associations; that is, politically compliant churches. Outside of PRAs, freedom to worship is constrained and contingent. Moreover, "The government repressed Protestant house church networks and cross-congressional affiliations, which it perceived as presenting a potential challenge to the authority of the government or the party."

- **Cuba:** The Fidelistas attempt to suppress all religions other than the church of Castro. Notes State: "The government continued to assert itself over all aspects of social life, including religious expression. Religious groups complained about widespread surveillance and infiltration by state security agents."

- **North Korea:** The so-called Democratic People's Republic of Korea attempts to control all aspects of life. The State report simply declares: "Genuine religious freedom does not exist and there was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom."

- **Russia:** The repression of the communist era has disappeared. Nevertheless, State reports "the government did not always respect" constitutional provisions calling for equality of all religions. At particular disadvantage were non-traditional groups, especially those viewed "as security threats" including Jehovah's Witnesses.

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