SAUDI ARABIA 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and the government severely restricted it in practice. According to the 1992 Basic Law, Sunni Islam is the official religion and the country's constitution is the Quran and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. The legal system is based on the government's application of the Hanbali School of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. The public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and there is no separation between state and religion. The government generally permitted Shia religious gatherings and non-Muslim private religious practices. Some Muslims who did not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship and community centers. The government executed at least one individual sentenced on charges of "witchcraft and sorcery" during the year. There were fewer reported charges of harassment and abuse for religious reasons at the hands of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) compared with the previous year, although online criticism of the organization increased. The government continued to revise school textbooks, removing some objectionable content. However, objectionable content remains, even in revised textbooks, including justification for the social exclusion and killing of Islamic minorities and "apostates;" claims that Jews, Christians, and Islamic minorities violate monotheism; and intolerant allusions to Shia and Sufi Muslims and other religious groups.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious vigilantes sometimes harassed and assaulted citizens and foreigners.

Senior U.S. government officials raised religious freedom issues at the highest levels within the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance (MOIA); Ministry of Interior (MOI); Ministry of Justice (MOJ); Human Rights Commission (HRC); Ministry of Education (MOE); and Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI) during the year. U.S. government officials also continued to meet with minority religious groups to discuss religious freedom concerns,

including with Shia groups and non-Muslim foreign residents. Saudi Arabia has been a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act since 2004 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In connection with the secretary of state's redesignation in August 2011, the secretary issued a waiver of sanctions on the same date "to further the purposes of the act."

Section I. Religious Demography

As of July 2012, the population is approximately 26.5 million, according to U.S. government estimates. Approximately 85 to 90 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims who predominantly adhere to the Hanbali School of Islamic jurisprudence. Shia constitute 10 to 15 percent of the population. Approximately 80 percent of Shia are "Twelvers" (followers of Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi, whom they recognize as the Twelfth Imam) and are primarily located in the Eastern Province. Twelver Shia adhere to the Jafari school of jurisprudence. Most of the remaining Shia population is Sulaimaniya Ismailis, also known as "Seveners" (those who branched off from the Twelvers to follow Isma'il ibn Jafar as the Seventh Imam). Seveners reside primarily in Najran Province, where they represent the majority of the province's more than one million inhabitants. Nakhawala, or "Medina Shia," reside in small numbers in the western Hejaz region. Estimates place their numbers around 1,000. Pockets of Zaydis, another offshoot of Shiism, number approximately 20,000 and exist primarily in the provinces of Jizan and Najran along the border with Yemen.

Foreign embassies indicate that the foreign population in the country, including many undocumented migrants, may exceed 12 million. Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available, but they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians (including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and Roman Catholics), Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. According to the Basic Law, Islam is the official religion, and the country's constitution is the Quran and the Sunna (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). There is no legal

recognition or protection of religious freedom, but the government generally allows the private practice of other religions.

The Basic Law establishes the country as a sovereign Arab Islamic state. Neither the government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of state and religion.

The government considers its legitimacy to rest in part on its custodianship of the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina and its promotion of Islam. The government's official interpretation of Islam is based on the Hanbali school of Sunni jurisprudence and is influenced by the writings and teachings of 18th-century Sunni religious scholar Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, who advocated a return to what he considered to be the practices of the early Muslim era and urged Muslims to adhere to the strictest interpretation of Islam. Outside the country this variant of Islamic practice is often referred to as "Wahhabism," a term the Saudis do not use.

The Islamic judicial system is based on laws derived from the Quran and the Sunna and on legal opinions and fatwas (rulings) of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars (ulema). Established in 1971, the council is an advisory body of 20 persons that reports to the king. The Basic Law recognizes the council, supported by the board of research and religious rulings, as the supreme authority on religious matters. It is headed by the grand mufti and is composed of Sunni religious scholars and jurists. Government universities provide training on all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, but focus on the Hanbali school; consequently, most Islamic law judges follow its system of interpretation. Three members of the council belong to non-Hanbali schools, representing the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi'i schools. There are no Shia members. Scholars are chosen at the king's discretion and serve renewable four-year terms, with most members serving for life. Islamic law is not based on precedent and rulings can diverge widely. In theory, rulings can be appealed to the appellate and supreme courts, but these higher courts must agree to hear the case.

The government permits Shia judges presiding over courts in the Eastern Province to use the Jafari school of Islamic jurisprudence to adjudicate cases in family law, inheritance, and endowment management. There are six Shia judges, all located in the Eastern Province cities of Qatif and al-Ahsa, where the majority of Shia live. Jurisdictionally these courts are only allowed to rule on cases in the Qatif and al-Ahsa areas; Shia from other regions (including those living in other parts of the Eastern Province, Najran Province, and the western Hejaz region) have no access

to local, regional, or national Shia courts. The powers of Shia courts are limited, because any litigant who disagrees with a ruling can seek a new decision from a Sunni court. Sunni court rulings can void Shia court rulings, and government departments can choose not to implement judgments rendered by Shia judges.

The calculation of accidental death or injury compensation is discriminatory. In the event a court renders a judgment in favor of a plaintiff who is a Jewish or Christian male, the plaintiff is only entitled to receive 50 percent of the compensation a Muslim male would receive; all other non-Muslims are only entitled to receive one-sixteenth of the amount a male Muslim would receive. Furthermore, judges may discount the testimony of non-practicing Muslims or individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam, and they may disregard the testimony of a non-Muslim in favor of the testimony of a Muslim. Moreover, courts adhere to the Quranic stipulation that in cases of capital punishment the value of a woman's testimony is only one-half that of a man's.

The Majlis al-Shura (the Consultative Council) is responsible for advising the king and can debate and propose legislation for approval by the Council of Ministers. The king appoints the Consultative Council's president and 150 members. There are only five Shia members. The Consultative Council's members are appointed to four-year terms; there is a limit on the number of terms a member may serve.

Mosques are the only public places of worship in Saudi Arabia, and the construction of churches, synagogues or other non-Muslim places of worship is not allowed. The MOIA is financially and administratively responsible for Sunni mosques, which according to its 2012 estimates, number around 75,000, 15,000 of which are Friday mosques (larger mosques that host Friday prayers and include a sermon). The MOIA employs approximately 75,000 Sunni imams and 15,000 Sunni Friday khateebs (sermon leaders) to staff these mosques. Imams receive monthly MOIA salaries ranging from 2,500 to 5,000 rivals (\$667 to \$1,333), depending on the seniority and educational level of the individual. The two mosques in Mecca and Medina do not come under MOIA jurisdiction. They are the responsibility of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Shrines, which reports directly to the king. Its head holds a rank equivalent to a government minister. Thousands of government-supported mosques are prominently located in both large and small cities. Thousands more exist in private homes, at rest stops along highways, in malls, and a variety of other locations throughout the country.

The government's stated policy is to permit private worship for all, including non-Muslims, and address government officials' violations of this policy as they occur; however, the CPVPV sometimes does not respect this policy. Individuals whose ability to worship privately is infringed upon can address their grievances to the MOI, the government's official Human Rights Commission (HRC), the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), a quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization (NGO), and when appropriate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The CPVPV, a semiautonomous agency commonly known as the religious police, has authority to monitor social behavior and enforce morality consistent with the government's interpretation of Islam and in coordination with law enforcement authorities. The 1980 law that formally defines the CPVPV's mission describes it as "guiding and advising people to observe the religious duties prescribed by Islamic Sharia, and to prevent committing [acts] proscribed and prohibited [by Sharia], or adopting bad habits and traditions or taboo [sic] heresies." The purview of the CPVPV includes public gender mixing and illegal private contact between men and women; practicing or displaying emblems of non-Muslim faiths or disrespecting Islam; displaying or selling media contrary to Islam, including pornography; producing, distributing, or consuming alcohol; venerating places or celebrating events inconsistent with approved Islamic practices; practicing sorcery or magic for profit; and committing or facilitating lewdness, including adultery, homosexuality, and gambling. Full-time CPVPV field officers are known as mutawwa'een; they do not wear uniforms, but are required to wear identification badges and can only legally act in their official capacity when accompanied by a regular policeman. According to the CPVPV's 2011 statistics, released in 2012, the CPVPV has 4,389 staff members located throughout Saudi Arabia's 13 provinces. Additionally there are more than 1,600 administrative support personnel. The CPVPV reports to the king through the Council of Ministers, and the MOI oversees its operations on the king's behalf.

The Council of Ministers established the 24-member HRC in 2005 to address human rights abuses and promote human rights within the country. The board includes at least two Shia members. The HRC regularly follows up on citizen complaints, including complaints of favoritism or unfair court decisions, but does not specifically address issues of religious freedom and tolerance.

No law requires all citizens to be Muslim, but non-Muslims and many foreign and Saudi Muslims whose beliefs are deemed not to conform with the government's interpretation of Islam must practice their religion in private and are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, detention, and, for noncitizens, deportation. Children

born to Muslim fathers are by law deemed Muslim, and conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy, which can be punishable by death. Blasphemy against Sunni Islam also can be punishable by death, but the more common penalty is a long prison sentence, lengthy detention without trial, or protective custody. There have been no confirmed reports of executions for either apostasy or blasphemy since 1992.

The law discriminates against adherents of religious groups deemed "polytheistic" and to a lesser extent against Christians and Jews, who are mentioned in the Quran as "People of the Book." The government officially does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some do so under other auspices and are generally able to hold private services. These entry restrictions make it difficult for non-Muslims to maintain regular contact with clergy. This is particularly problematic for Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, whose religious traditions require that they receive sacraments from a priest on a regular basis. However, many non-Muslims continue to gather for private worship.

Widespread prejudice against Shia remains. Reports persist that Shia face discrimination in education, employment, the military, political representation, the judiciary, religious practice, and the media, although they are represented in these fields. Primary reasons for discrimination include historical Sunni-Shia animosity, suspicion of Iranian influence on Shia actions, and the view that Shia are polytheists who commit apostasy by practicing some of their religious rites.

The MOIA determines the qualifications of Sunni clerics and is responsible for investigating complaints against them, particularly clerics who make intolerant statements or promote intolerance, violence, or hatred. In 2003 the MOIA created a program to monitor all government-paid clerics. Provincial committees of senior religious scholars supervise full-time MOIA employees who monitor all mosques and clerics through scheduled and unscheduled visits and receipt of public complaints. Based on their reports, the committees summon clerics accused of preaching extremist ideologies. If the provincial committees are not able to dissuade these clerics from their thinking, the clerics are referred to a central committee or dismissed. Under this program, the MOIA has removed 3,500 imams from duty since 2003. In a move to curb extremist and "absurd" fatwas, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz decreed in 2010 that only members of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, and those whom the king permits, may issue public fatwas. This decree is still in effect.

The government requires noncitizen legal residents to carry an identity card containing a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim." Older residency cards bear more specific religious designations such as "Christian."

The naturalization law requires that applicants attest to their religious affiliation and requires applicants to get a certificate endorsed by a Muslim religious authority. Non-Muslims must convert to Islam before they are eligible to naturalize.

The government severely limits freedom of religious assembly, including by not allowing non-Muslims to worship publicly and hindering the establishment and maintenance of non-Sunni places of worship. All new mosques require the permission of the MOIA, the local municipality, and the provincial government, which is functionally part of the MOI. The MOIA supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of most Sunni mosques, including the hiring of clerical workers, while the other approximately 30 percent of Sunni mosques are at private residences or were built and endowed by private persons. Individuals responsible for the supervision of a mosque are selected from the local community.

The government does not finance construction or maintenance of Shia mosques, and the process for obtaining a government-required license for a Shia mosque is reportedly unclear and arbitrary. However, Shia manage their own mosques, under the supervision of Shia scholars.

Discussion of sensitive religious issues such as sectarian differences is rare, and criticism of Islam is forbidden. The government prohibits the public propagation of Islamic teachings that differ from the official interpretation of Islam and restricts the public religious training of non-Sunni groups and clergy.

Officially the government allows religious materials for personal use in the country; customs officials and the CPVPV do not have the authority to confiscate personal religious materials. Furthermore, the government's stated policy for its diplomatic and consular missions abroad is to inform foreign workers applying for visas that they have the right to worship privately and possess personal religious materials. The government also provides the name of the offices where grievances can be filed.

Regardless of a student's personal religious traditions, public school students at all levels receive mandatory religious instruction based on the government's interpretation of Islam. Students in private international schools are not required to

study Islam. Private religious schools not based on the official interpretation of Islam are not permitted.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including reports of imprisonment and detention. The government generally enforced legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom. At least one individual was beheaded for engaging in "sorcery." There were reports of activists being arrested and charged with apostasy and blasphemy, which carry potential death penalties. The government reportedly deported foreigners for worshipping privately. Shia continued to face discrimination, and public Shia celebrations were restricted, even in some areas with large Shia populations. A Shia cleric was arrested after being shot and remains in detention without charge. Shia also faced significant obstacles to building social and religious centers and were underrepresented in government and educational positions. Anti-Shia rhetoric persisted in Sunni mosques and government officials reportedly made intolerant public remarks. The government school textbook reform project continued, resulting in the elimination of some intolerant messages, but intolerant language remains. There were reports of government officials pressuring employers not to renew the residency cards of employees who had been found organizing non-Muslim religious services. Ismailis reported improved conditions. The government closed one satellite television channel after it aired remarks disparaging to Ismailis.

On June 19, Muree bin Ali bin Issa al-Asiri was beheaded in Najran on criminal charges of "practicing witchcraft and sorcery" and for owning "written talismans." His execution took place after his sentence was upheld by the highest courts.

Raef Badawi, a human rights activist, was arrested in Jeddah on June 17 on charges of "insulting Islam through electronic channels" and "going beyond the realm of obedience." Badawi had, with others, declared May 7 a day for liberals on the Free Saudi Liberals Web site, which Badawi co-founded in 2008 as a platform for debating religious and political matters in Saudi Arabia. On December 17, a Jeddah court referred a charge of apostasy, which can be punishable by death, against Badawi to a higher court, where it was pending at year's end.

Arrests on charges of blasphemy also continued. On February 5, Hamza Kashgari, a 23-year-old blogger and activist, posted three tweets to his Twitter account on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad that authorities deemed "blasphemous." Following public calls for severe punishment, including by government officials, Kashgari fled the country; he was detained in Malaysia at the request of the government and forcibly repatriated. After returning to Saudi Arabia, Kashgari publicly "repented" before a court; he remained in protective custody at year's end.

On December 24, writer Turki al-Hamad was reportedly arrested after publishing on Twitter comments critical of Islamists and political Islam. He remained in detention. The Riyadh-based NGO Global Commission for Introducing the Messenger claimed it had requested that the interior minister detain al-Hamad for his controversial comments.

The government blocked access to some Web sites with religious content it considered offensive or sensitive, including the Shia news Web site Al-Rasid. This was in line with a broader official policy of censoring objectionable content, including political discourse and illicit materials. In September authorities threatened to block video-sharing Web site YouTube if the site's owner, Google Inc., did not bar access to an amateur movie many viewed as insulting to Muslims. The company complied with the demand.

Some non-Muslims in different parts of the country were detained, harassed, and ultimately deported for worshipping privately. On August 1, the government deported the last of 35 Ethiopian Christians arrested in late 2011during a Christian prayer service. The 35 were imprisoned for several months without charge and were deported, including those with legal status in the country. The Ethiopians were accused of "intermingling between members of the opposite sex outside of family." The prisoners claimed that police had actually arrested them for practicing Christianity, and several human rights groups claimed the government's interrogation of the individuals focused largely on their faith.

Hadi al-Mutif, a Sulaimaniya Ismaili Shia who had been on death row for 16 years for "insulting the Prophet Muhammad," and who had received an additional five-year sentence on September 3, 2009 for criticizing the government's justice system and human rights record, was pardoned and released in February.

Pressure on Shia clerics continued. Awamiyah-based Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr was arrested July 8, suffering a gunshot wound to the leg in the process. In June al-Nimr had stated that Shia should celebrate the recent death of Crown Prince

Naif, raising the ire of conservative Sunnis and presumably precipitating the arrest. Al-Nimr was arrested twice before, in 2004 and 2006, although no charges were filed at those times. An arrest warrant was issued for al-Nimr in 2009 after he called for Eastern Province secession if Shia did not receive equal rights. While at least 35 of his followers were arrested in the immediate aftermath of his call for secession, al-Nimr was not arrested at that time. He is currently being held in prison, and no charges have been filed.

Harassment of Shia during public gatherings continued. Authorities arrested approximately 500 Shia in the Eastern Province in connection with protests over the course of the year. By year's end, approximately 163 Shia remained in detention. The government continued to prohibit public, non-Muslim religious activities across the country and further restricted non-Sunni activities in predominantly Sunni areas. Public celebrations of Ashura, a Shia religious holiday, and other smaller Shia holidays were permitted in Qatif, an almost completely Shia governorate in the Eastern Province. The same celebrations were required to be conducted in private, however, in Al-Ahsa, an area in the Eastern Province with an almost equal proportion of Sunnis and Shia.

Many of the reported abuses related to public, non-Muslim religious activities and non-Sunni activities, which were difficult to corroborate because of witnesses' or victims' fears that disclosing such information might cause harm to themselves or to others. Moreover, information regarding government practices was generally incomplete because judicial proceedings usually were not publicized or were closed to the public, despite provisions in the criminal procedure law that require court proceedings to be open. There were reports that some trials were open to family members of the accused and journalists. Many non-Muslims worshiped in secret because of continuing fear of harassment and intimidation by police or the CPVPV, as well as police detention or deportation. Online criticism against the CPVPV increased during the year.

According to the media, police detained and imprisoned persons on charges of sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft. The CPVPV launched a new campaign against sorcery during the year; sorcery has been described as one of the "key causes of religious and social instability in the Kingdom." In March the CPVPV established a "field unit" to arrest "sorcerers and charlatans" and refer them to the relevant authorities. Anti-sorcery departments exist within CPVPV branches across the country.

The government continued to combat "extremist" ideology by scrutinizing religious clerics and teachers closely and dismissing those found to be promoting views it deemed intolerant or extreme. At least one imam, Hani Abdulrahim Al Rifa'i, a prominent cleric in Jeddah, was dismissed and prevented from offering sermons and leading prayer at a large Jeddah mosque, reportedly for covering political topics in his sermons. The MOIA supervised clerics through regular inspections, surprise inspections, complaints received from worshipers, and investigations of accusations in the press. The MOIA also monitored and posted counter-arguments on extremist online forums and Web sites during the year.

The government restricted the ability of religious leaders and activists to express views critical of the religious establishment. However, there were reports that Sunni clerics, who received government stipends, occasionally used anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and anti-Shia language in their sermons. Anti-Shia rhetoric in Sunni mosques in the Eastern Province reportedly increased during the year, and preachers in mosques, including the mosques of Mecca and Medina, allegedly ended Friday sermons with a prayer for the well-being of Muslims and for the humiliation of polytheism and polytheists. Intolerant statements were also delivered by high-ranking religious officials. For example, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al al-Sheikh, in response to a question on a proposal to remove churches in Kuwait, reportedly stated that all churches in the Arabian Peninsula should be demolished.

There were reports from human rights organizations of non-Muslims who were under pressure to convert to Islam. According to these reports, in several public hospitals non-Muslim nurses were obliged to attend meetings in which Christian converts to Islam made speeches about their conversions.

The government generally limited public religious practice to activities that conform to the official interpretation of Islam. Practices that diverged from the official interpretation, such as celebrating Maulid Al-Nabi (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, were forbidden. Enforcement was more relaxed in some communities than in others. For example, authorities allowed Shia in the Eastern Province city of Qatif greater freedom in their religious practices, including the public commemoration of Ashura. This event was held with minimal government interference. In other areas with large Shia populations, such as al-Ahsa and Dammam, authorities restricted Shia religious activities, including public observances of Ashura, public marches, loudspeaker broadcasts of clerics' lectures from Shia community centers, and, in some instances, gatherings within those centers.

Shia described restrictions on their visits to Mecca and Medina as interference by Sunni authorities in private Muslim worship. In addition, government religious authorities continued the practice of destroying ancient Shia Islamic historical sites.

Shia mosques in mixed religious neighborhoods reportedly were required to recite the Sunni call to prayer, which is distinct from the Shia call. However, in some predominantly Shia areas of Al-Ahsa, Shia mosques previously required to use the Sunni call to prayer began using the Shia call. Although Shia combine two of the five daily Sunni prayers, Shia businessmen often were forced to close their shops during all five prayer times, in accordance with the country's official Sunni practices.

Some Shia faced obstacles constructing mosques and Husseiniyas, or community centers. At least 70 Husseiniyas in Al-Ahsa have reportedly been closed due to lack of licenses, which are difficult to obtain. Many Husseiniyas, however, have been allowed to reopen. The government stymied attempts to build Husseiniyas in private homes by not approving plans for new homes that included a Husseiniya. Constructing new Shia mosques in Al-Ahsa was much more difficult than building a Sunni mosque. Virtually all old mosques were unable to obtain licenses and faced the threat of closure at any time. Moreover, there were reports that security forces demolished a Shia mosque in Awamiyah in September during the crackdown on protesters in the town. Shia in other parts of the country were not allowed to build Shia-specific mosques. However, the government did approve construction of some new Shia mosques in Qatif and Al-Ahsa-sometimes after lengthy delays due to the numerous approvals required-but did not approve construction of Shia mosques in Dammam, home to many Shia. Ismailis in Najran Province reportedly did not face similar obstacles to building and renovating mosques.

The government did not officially recognize several centers of Shia religious instruction located in the Eastern Province, provide financial support for them, recognize certificates of educational attainment for their graduates, or provide employment for their graduates, all of which it does for Sunni religious training institutions.

During the year, there was significant public discussion, including in the media, questioning the official version of religious traditions and criticizing their enforcement. However, discussion of sensitive religious issues such as sectarian

differences remained limited, and criticism of Islam was forbidden. Individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam risked harassment, intimidation, and detention, and foreigners who did so risked deportation. Journalists and activists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma risked detention, travel bans, and government shutdown of their publications.

The government continued to exclude Shia perspectives from the state's extensive religious media and broadcast programming. The government sporadically imposed bans on the importation and sale of Shia books and audiovisual products. In addition, terms like "rejectionists," which are insulting to Shia, were commonly found in public discourse.

In higher education the government discriminated against Shia in the selection process for students, professors, and administrators at public universities. For example, Shia constituted an estimated 5 percent of professors at a leading university in al-Ahsa, an area with a population that is at least 50 percent Shiite.

At the primary and secondary levels of education in al-Ahsa, there continued to be severe underrepresentation of Shia among school principals. There were no female Shia principals in the 200 schools for girls in al-Ahsa, and 15 male Shia principals in the 200 schools for boys in Al-Ahsa.

Shia faced significant employment discrimination in the public sector. A very small number of Shia occupied high-level positions in government-owned companies and government agencies. Many Shia believed that openly identifying themselves as Shia would negatively affect career advancement.

Qatif community leaders described zoning laws that prevent construction of buildings over a certain height in various Shia neighborhoods. The leaders stated the laws prevented investment and development in these areas and aimed to limit the density of the Shia population in any given area.

Members of the Shia minority were subjected to political discrimination as well. For example, although Shia constituted approximately 10 to 15 percent of the total citizen population and approximately one-third to one-half of the Eastern Province population, they were underrepresented in senior government positions. Shia were significantly underrepresented in national security-related positions, including the Ministry of Defense, the National Guard, and the MOI. Shia were better represented in the ranks of traffic police, municipalities, and public schools in

predominantly Shia areas. There were no Shia ministers, deputy ministers, governors, deputy governors, or ministry branch directors in the Eastern Province, and only three of the 59 government-appointed municipal council members were Shia. Shia held six of 11elected seats on Eastern Province municipal councils. An elected Shia headed the Qatif municipal council.

Judicial discrimination against Shia was evident during the year. Shia leaders argued that the one court of appeals on which Shia judges sit has no real authority and only verifies documents.

In addition to these discriminatory practices, Nakhawala leaders stated that the Shia in their community faced even more problems, particularly in comparison to the Twelvers in the Eastern Province. They stated that anti-Shia sermons and statements were heard regularly in their neighborhoods. The Nakhawala also asserted that their surname ("al-Nakhly," which roughly translates as "farmers" and identifies their minority status and sect) facilitated systematic discrimination against them in employment and education.

The Sulaimaniya Ismaili community reported improving conditions in Najran Province. Although community leaders asserted that the government discriminated against them by prohibiting their religious books, disparaging comments about Ismailis aired on the religious satellite channel Awtan in April led to the government taking the channel off the air. Ismailis reportedly occupied government positions in Najran Provice, including military and police positions.

Some authorities have indicated that they consider Ahmadiyya Muslims to be Muslims, but the legal status of the group was unclear. Ahmadis were not allowed to perform pilgrimage. Mainly foreign workers from India and Pakistan, the Ahmadis hide their faith to avoid arrest and deportation. In May two brothers, Sultan Hamid and Saud Falih Al-Enezi, were reportedly arrested and sent to a prison in the Northern Border province after refusing to recant their beliefs. Their families and community members were not allowed to contact them, and there was no information on their judicial process at the end of the year.

The Ministry of Education stated that the textbooks for grades one through nine had been reformed by the end of the year to remove intolerant language. Results for grades three, six, and nine had not yet been assessed at year's end. Results for grades one, two, four, five, seven, and eight were mixed. Lessons discouraging the oppression of religious minorities and laws favoring Muslims replaced themes of intolerance, exclusion, and hostility. Textbooks for these grades continued to

contain directives to kill "sorcerers" and socially exclude infidels, as well as claims that Jews, Christians, Shia, and Sufis violated monotheism.

Textbooks for grades 10, 11, and 12 – slated for review and reform in 2013 – retained inflammatory and anti-Semitic material. For example, these textbooks stated that apostates from Islam should be killed if they do not repent within three days of being warned, and described Islamic minorities and Christians as heretics. Descriptions of Jews and Christians as apes and swine remained. These textbooks also stated that treachery is a permanent characteristic of non-Muslims, especially Jews, propagated conspiracy theories that international organizations such as Masons support Zionism, and presented historical forgeries, such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, as fact.

However, textbooks at all levels contained positive statements as well, including rejection of terrorism, acknowledgement that some People of the Book "are prone to goodness," and support for religious tolerance.

There were reports that authorities pressured the sponsor and employer of a non-Muslim and his family not to renew the family's residence cards after it was allegedly discovered that the expatriate had organized private non-Muslim worship services. The expatriate and his family were "blacklisted" from receiving renewed residency cards and were reportedly unable to leave Saudi Arabia or travel outside their towns of residence at year's end. It is unclear why the family was not deported per usual practice when residency status is not renewed.

King Abdullah continued a national dialogue campaign to increase tolerance and encourage moderation and understanding. The campaign advocated against religious extremism and intolerant language, especially in mosques and schools. The King Abdullah Center for National Dialogue (KACND) partnered with UNESCO to conduct international training sessions on dialogue, held abroad. The center also held domestic National Meetings on topics ranging from women's rights to dealing with world cultures. The center continued to conclude memoranda of understanding with government ministries and institutions, including the MOIA, the CPVPV, universities, and charities. The center trained CPVPV members on "Successful Dialogue" and "Communication Skills" in two regional branches. The KACND also collaborated with the Ministry of Education and UNESCO on teaching acceptance of cultural diversity and of the Quranic concept that "there is no compulsion in religion."

The King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, located in Vienna, Austria, opened in November.

Some leading government and religious officials, including the king and crown prince, made strong public statements against extremism and instead advocated tolerance and moderation. For example, on August 12 at the Islamic Solidarity Summit, King Abdullah stated: "If we observe justice, then we conquer injustice. If we practice moderation, then we conquer extremism. If we reject dispersion, then we could keep our unity, strength, and determination." Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said in November at the opening of the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue that sectarian differences are bases for understanding, not collision.

Other improvements included augmented efforts to curb and investigate harassment by the CPVPV (particularly through specialized training to improve its performance) and increased media coverage and criticism of the CPVPV. The CPVPV's new director Sheikh Abd al Latif Al Sheikh vowed to regulate the organization more carefully. During the year, CPVPV leadership cracked down on religious vigilantes and volunteers unaffiliated with the CPVPV and acting on their own who sometimes harassed and assaulted citizens and foreigners. The CPVPV has also promised to hire women to deal with "female offenders." In addition, during the year prisons began requiring a court order before accepting those arrested by the CPVPV.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In addition to the religious basis on which the government claims its authority and the significant role of the country's religious leadership, there was intense societal pressure on the population to conform to cultural-religious norms. As a result, a majority of citizens supported a state based on Islamic law, although there were differing views as to how this should be realized in practice.

Shia faced employment discrimination in the private sector. There was no formal policy concerning the hiring and promotion of Shia in the private sector, but anecdotal evidence suggested that in some companies, including the oil and petrochemical industries, a "glass ceiling" existed and Shia were passed over for less-qualified Sunni colleagues.

Discrimination based on religion was a factor in the mistreatment of foreign workers by citizen employers and coworkers.

Religious vigilantes and/or volunteers unaffiliated with the CPVPV also existed but often acted alone, sometimes harassing and assaulting citizens and foreigners.

International media criticism of government educational materials continued during the year.

There continued to be unconfirmed reports that Sunni imams, who receive government stipends, used anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and anti-Shia language in their sermons. During the year the Ministry of Islamic Affairs issued periodic circulars to clerics and imams in mosques directing them to include messages on the principles of justice, equality, and tolerance and to encourage rejection of bigotry and all forms of racial discrimination in their sermons.

Editorial cartoons occasionally exhibited anti-Semitism characterized by stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, particularly at times of heightened political tensions with Israel. Anti-Semitic comments by journalists, academics, and clerics occasionally appeared in the media. On August 13, Salman Al-Awdah, a popular religious scholar who holds no official position, stated during an interview on a private satellite television channel that while the Holocaust has "an historical basis," it has become "exaggerated" and a "source for extortion." Al-Awdah continued that "the role of the Jews is to wreak destruction, wage war, and to practice deception and extortion." He then told a story claiming that Jews use human blood to make Passover matzohs.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials pressed the government to respect religious freedom and honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote respect for non-Muslim religious belief, and combat violent extremism. Senior U.S. government officials raised these issues at the highest levels within the MOIA, MOJ, MOI, HRC, MOE, and MOCI during the year. Embassy officials also continued to meet with minority religious groups, including Shia, and with non-Muslim foreign residents to discuss their religious freedom concerns. Additionally, the embassy regularly included government officials in U.S. visitor programs to promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

Saudi Arabia has been a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act since 2004 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In connection with the secretary of state's redesignation in August 2011, the secretary issued a waiver of sanctions on the same date "to further the purposes of the act."