**2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: The Netherlands**
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## THE NETHERLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Both government policy and the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contribute to the free practice of religion.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

### Section I. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. The Constitution permits the Government to place restrictions on the exercise of religion only on limited grounds, such as health hazards, traffic safety, and risk of public disorder.

The Calvinist Reformist Church enjoyed a privileged status until 1795. It received Government subsidies and only church members could hold public office. Church and state have been separate since 1798. However, the Government provides state subsidies to religious organizations that maintain educational facilities. The Government provides funding to public as well as to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and religious health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In order to qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious based criteria for curriculum standards, minimum size, and health care.

Religious Demography

Approximately 30 percent of the population consider themselves Roman Catholic, 15 percent Dutch Reformed, 7 percent Calvinist Reformist, 8 percent non-Christian (Islamic, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist), and 40 percent atheist or agnostic.

Dutch society has become increasingly secular. According to the Government's Social Cultural Planning Bureau, church membership has declined steadily from 76 percent in

1958 to 41 percent in 1995 and still is decreasing, although at a slower pace. The breakdown within this 41 percent is 20 percent Roman Catholic, 9 percent Dutch Reformed, 6 percent Calvinist Reformist, 2 percent Muslim, and 4 percent other. Membership is decreasing among all denominations, except Islam, which is expected to become the second largest religion in the country within the next decade.

About 24 percent of citizens are active within their religious communities. One in three Roman Catholics goes to church at least once a month. About one in two Dutch Reformed members and two of three Calvinist Reformists do the same. Those who leave a church rarely return.

Nonetheless, significant numbers of those who have left their churches still consider themselves to be members of a religious group. About 60 percent of citizens claim adherence to a religion. However, the beliefs and practices of many of these adherents have developed into what some describe as a selective approach to religion: accepting the positive but not the negative aspects of a particular religion. About 20 percent of citizens, primarily among those who have left the "traditional" churches, describe themselves as "seekers of spiritual or philosophical truths." These persons tend to gravitate toward (though not necessarily join) newer or non-Orthodox religious movements, such as Pentecostal groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Theosophy or Anthroposophy.

In the wake of secularization since the 1960's, many Roman Catholics left the Church. Among those remaining, many express alienation from their religious hierarchy and doctrine. For example, most Dutch Catholics express no objections to female or married priests and differ with church thinking on a number of sensitive doctrinal issues.

Dutch Protestantism is quite heterogeneous. Among the Protestant churches, the Dutch Reformed Church remains the largest, although it is also the one that has suffered the greatest losses to secularization. Church membership in this denomination has declined by two-thirds in the past 50 years. The second largest Protestant group, the Calvinist Reformist Church, has been less affected by membership losses and even has succeeded in attracting former members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Other Protestant denominations include Baptists, Lutherans, and Remonstrants.

The country has a long tradition of providing shelter to non-Christian religions. Jews have been in the Netherlands since the late 16th century. By the beginning of World War II, the Netherlands counted 125,000 Jews, half of whom lived in Amsterdam. About 110,000 were killed by the Nazi regime. Following the war, more than 10,000 citizens emigrated to Israel. The current Jewish community includes fewer than 20,000 members but is thriving and operates its own schools.

Only 49 Muslims lived in the country in 1879. After 1960 the number of Muslims began to rise due to the arrival of migrant workers, primarily from Morocco and Turkey. Family unification increased their numbers to 234,000 Moroccans and 279,000 Turks by 1998 (out of a total population of 16 million). Additional Muslims came from the former Dutch colony of Suriname. In the past decade, Muslim numbers further increased due to the large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Bosnia. By 1998 about 700,000 persons, or 4.4 percent of the population, were Muslim--the majority Sunni.

Islam is growing quickly. There is a network of mosques and cultural centers. Mosques and centers are organized to conform to the country's system of subsidies, which underwrites cultural activities geared to social orientation and promotion of equal opportunities. The number of mosques has grown to over 300. The increased influence of Islam also is reflected in the founding of over 30 Islamic schools, which is facilitated by legislation that recognizes and provides equal funding to schools representing different religious or philosophical backgrounds.

The law provides for minority views to be heard on radio and television. Thus, broadcasting time has been allotted to the Islamic Broadcasting Foundation, an alliance of

all Muslim groups in the country.

The Government of Turkey exercises influence within the Dutch-Turkish Islamic community through its religious affairs directorate, the Diyanet, which is permitted to appoint imams for the 140 Turkish mosques in the country. There is no such arrangement with the Moroccan Government that allows it to appoint religious officials to Moroccan mosques. The Moroccan Government tries to exercise influence over the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies. Dutch authorities have not been pleased with Turkish and Moroccan interference with religious and political affairs because it appears to run counter to government efforts to encourage integration of Muslims into Dutch society. For example, government authorities insist on strict observance of mandatory school attendance up to the age of 16. They disapprove of appeals by foreign imams to keep sexually mature girls under the age of 16 at home. To counter such influence the authorities have proposed training imams in the Netherlands itself, a measure that is opposed within the Islamic communities.

A sizable community of about 90,000 Hindus has arrived from the former Dutch colony of Suriname. The country also hosts smaller groups of Hindus who came from India and Uganda, as well as such movements based on Hindu teachings as Ramakrishna, Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, and Osho. The Buddhist community is quite small, with about 17,000 members.

There were no reports of foreign missionary groups operating in the country.

Disputes have arisen when the exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and speech clashed with the strictly enforced ban on discrimination. Such disputes are addressed either in the courts or by antidiscrimination boards. In November 1999, a clergyman of the Pentecostal church in the town of Hengelo was acquitted in court on charges of discriminating against homosexuals. In a public letter he called homophilia, pedophilia, and polygamy "filthy sins." In its verdict the court reaffirmed longstanding jurisprudence that such a statement made on religious grounds did not constitute a criminal offense if the intention to offend or discriminate against homosexuals was deemed absent.

The Equal Opportunities Committee in July 1999 ruled that an educational institute in The Hague acted incorrectly by denying two young women training as shop workers because they were wearing headscarves on religious grounds. The institute rejected them because it believed that they would not be able to find employment after training if they continued to wear headscarves. With this ruling the Equal Opportunities Committee reaffirmed its opinion that the wearing of headscarves may be banned only on serious grounds, such as security considerations.

In other areas, employers have been rebuked publicly for failure to allow non-Christians leave on their religious holidays, for objecting to Sikhs wearing turbans or Muslim women wearing headscarves, or to observance of food requirements on religious grounds. The Equal Opportunities Committee in July 1999 ruled against a company that had denied employment to a Turkish applicant because he intended to attend Friday service at a mosque. This was considered a violation of freedom of religion. According to the Committee, Friday service for Muslims is the same as Sunday service for Christians. It ruled that employers are obliged to take account of reasonable religious demands from their employees, except in exceptional circumstances.

The Calvinist Reformist Social Union (RMU) charged that the 1996 law on working hours contributed to discrimination. This law permits work on Sunday under certain circumstances. Based on a survey among 2,000 companies, the RMU reported that job applicants increasingly are turned down if they refuse for religious reasons to work on Sunday. The larger labor federations reacted by calling for agreements between labor and management on the practice of religion during working hours. This matter usually does not lead to problems; however, if problems arise the federations made clear their intention to call upon offending employers to observe this fundamental right. The legislature is working on an amendment to the laws on working hours and business hours to permit employees to claim time off for the practice of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Conversions of Minor U.S. Citizens

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

**Section II. Societal attitudes**

Religious communities live alongside each other in harmony. The main Christian denominations participate in the National Council of Churches and have adopted an ecumenical approach to interfaith relations. The Council regularly presents common positions of the churches on matters of faith, church, and society. Protestant denominations in particular are significant promoters of Israel and the Jewish cause. The Protestant churches also reach out to the Islamic community. Incidents of anti-Semitism are rare; however, there were a number of complaints about anti-Semitism on Internet sites set up by Dutch citizens. The Discrimination on the Internet Registration Center recorded 181 complaints in 1999 about discriminatory statements, racial discrimination, or anti-Semitism on the Internet. Most statements were removed voluntarily by the authors at the Center's request. Two complaints were passed to the Public Prosecutor when the authors refused to remove the controversial texts from the Internet. Decisions on the two cases are still pending.

Ethnic minorities are occasional victims of incidents of discrimination. Non-Europeans, such as Turks, Moroccans or refugees from Iran and Iraq are occasional victims of discrimination, but primarily on racial or ethnic grounds and not because they are Muslims. Examples of religious discrimination incidents are primarily of an anti-Semitic nature and involve use of swastikas, distributing neo-Nazi propaganda, and making the Hitler salute. The labor federations have been working to include in collective bargaining agreements stipulations that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Christian religious holidays. Such stipulations have now been included in most agreements.

**Section III. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Promoting religious freedom around the world is a high priority goal of Dutch foreign policy. The U.S. Embassy works very closely with the Government to promote religious freedom. In March 2000, Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom Robert Seiple and David Saperstein, Chairman of the Commission on Religious Freedom, met with government officials to discuss U.S. and Dutch initiatives to advance understanding of the issue. The Government has supported efforts to monitor religious persecution more closely and has instituted additional reporting requirements for its own embassies.

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Europe and the New Independent States Index | Table of Contents | International Religious Freedom | Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor |