



## Greece

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. While the government generally respected this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encountered legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing and stipulate that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

Improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government continued during the period covered by this report. Improvements included legislation passed in 2006 that allowed cremation (although cremation facilities have not been constructed yet) and repealed the law requiring consultations with local Greek Orthodox bishops before granting house of prayer permits to other religions.

There was some societal discrimination based on religion. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion by fellow citizens or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 81,935 square miles and a population of 10.9 million. The government did not keep statistics on religious groups. An estimated 97 percent of citizens identified themselves as Greek Orthodox. The other 3 percent of the population was composed of Old Calendarist Orthodox, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, Protestants, the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints, Scientologists, Jews, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and followers of polytheistic Hellenic religions. There was no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents and immigrants were not Greek Orthodox. The largest groups were secular, Muslim, and Roman Catholic, and resided largely in Athens.

Foreign missionary groups in the country were active.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. While the Government generally respected this right in practice, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encountered legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing and stipulate that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

The Government financially supports the Orthodox Church; for example, the Government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy and finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. The Government also pays the salaries and some expenses of the three official Muslim religious leaders (muftis and acting muftis) in Thrace, and provides a small monthly allowance to imams in Thrace. In May 2006, representatives of the Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece formally objected in public statements, press releases, and appeals to the government about the fact that the government pays the salaries of religious officials from the Greek Orthodox and Muslim faiths but not of Jewish rabbis. The Jewish Community reported it has requested equal treatment on this issue from the government.

Government officials stated they have received no formal request on the issue.

The Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Islam are the only religious groups legally deemed to be "legal persons of public law." Other religious groups are "legal persons of private law." The primary distinction is that the Civil Code's provisions pertaining to corporations regulate the establishment of "houses of prayer" for religious groups other than the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam. For example, other religious groups cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the religious body itself. Other religious groups also face additional legal and administrative burdens because they cannot function as legal entities. Scientologists and followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions practiced their faith under several registered nonprofit civil law organizations. The Baha'i and members of other religious groups have expressed their desire to operate within a legal framework as legally recognized religions, rather than as "associations." Members of religious groups that are classified as private entities because they are not recognized as legal entities in public law cannot be represented in court as religious entities, and therefore cannot bequeath or inherit property as a religious entity.

The law extends legal recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. The government recognizes the Orthodox Church's canon law, both within the Church and in such areas of civil law as marriage. The Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought government recognition of its canon law since 1999. It has also sought unsuccessfully for a legal procedure to recognize its religious institutions built after 1946. In April 2006, the Ministry of Education and Religion established a committee to study the issue and propose a legislative arrangement to this problem for the Catholic Church. The Committee met in 2007 but has produced no results so far.

No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a "known religion." Recognition is granted indirectly by applying for and receiving a "house of prayer" permit to open houses of worship from the Ministry of Education and Religion.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations are discriminatory because the government subsidizes the Orthodox Church, while other groups are self-supporting. Taxation legislation gradually abolishes, by 2007, tax on property revenues received by Orthodox churches and institutions. It is unclear whether this legislation might be applicable to other religious groups.

The law provides for alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors. Conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals or municipal and public services for two times the length of military service minus one month, typically twenty-three months. Conscientious objector groups and Amnesty International generally characterized legal provisions for conscientious objector status as a positive step, but criticized the longer service term as punitive. They also reported that uneven administration of the civilian service in some cases led to poor working conditions and noted that it would be preferable for the civilian service to be under civilian administration rather than under the Ministry of Defense.

Mandatory military service is three months for "repatriated" citizens, those who emigrated from the former communist bloc and are of Greek origin, and five months for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin and became conscientious objectors later in their life are ineligible for alternative service and have taken their cases to the courts. Those who became conscientious objectors after they performed their military service and were placed on reservist lists are not recognized, as there is no legal provision covering those who change their status after having completed military service. Several cases involving such conscientious objectors were pending before the Council of State, but were dropped after a change to the law exempted persons over 35 years of age from conscription.

Orthodox religious instruction in public, primary, and secondary schools is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement. However, schools offer no alternative supervision for these children during the period of religious instruction; they sometimes attended Orthodox religious instruction. Some Thracian Muslims resident in Athens were lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called wakfs, allows muftis to render religious judicial services (under the Islamic law Shari'a) in the area of family law, and the right to Turkish-language education. Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Qur'anic schools funded by the state. Special consideration is given to Muslim minority students from Thrace for admission to technical institutes and universities that set aside 0.5 percent of the total number of places for them annually.

The Government maintains that Muslims outside Thrace are not covered by the Treaty of Lausanne and therefore do not enjoy those rights provided by the Treaty. Muslim parents complained that hundreds of Turkish speaking children in the Athens area attending Greek language schools did not receive instruction of Greek as a second language; and therefore their ability to succeed in a scholastic setting in Greek is limited. There is one multicultural elementary "pilot school" in the Athens neighborhood of Gazi, which is part of the public school system, and provides for remedial Greek instruction. The

school is funded by the school system and supported by a University of Athens project. Its teachers specialize in teaching Greek to non-Greek speaking children.

The Government recognizes Shari'a (Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues for Muslims who reside in Thrace. The first instance courts in Thrace routinely ratified decisions of the muftis who have judicial powers in civic and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee, an autonomous body that is the government's advisory organ on protection of human rights, stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and should stop recognizing Shari'a, because it can restrict the civic rights of the citizens to whom it is applied. In 2005 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern regarding the impediments that Muslim women in Thrace face under Shari'a law. In March 2006 the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur for Religion or Belief reported that they were informed of cases of both early marriages and marriages by proxy. Muslim female activists claimed that because all Muslim women in Thrace were married under Shari'a, they were therefore obliged to acquire mufti consent to obtain a divorce. The Mufti's decisions on requests for divorce are based on interpretations of Shari'a law that do not exist in written form and therefore cannot be appealed by the parties to the divorce. The courts routinely ratified most mufti decisions regarding divorce.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Education and Religion rejected the Church of Scientology's application for recognition and a house-of-prayer permit in 2000 on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Scientologists subsequently registered as a nonprofit organization because the group's legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion.

Scientologists have not been able to build a house of prayer. Different groups that follow the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition applied in each of the last three years for house-of-prayer permits. In the past, the Ministry of Education and Religion had not responded despite advice from the Ombudsman for Human Rights telling the Ministry to respond. In September 2006, the Ministry did respond to one of these groups, stating that it "would delay its formal response due to the seriousness and the peculiarity of the matter." The Jehovah's Witnesses have five pending house-of-prayer permit requests dating from 2005. They sent a protest letter to the Ombudsman in December 2006 but have received no response as of the end of the reporting period. Members of the Jehovah's Witness community report that two Greek Orthodox Bishops have made requests to a local court that the Jehovah's Witnesses house-of-prayer permits be repealed. The matter is reportedly pending in the Greek Court system. Reportedly, Jehovah's Witnesses filed another three applications for permits for Kingdom Halls in 2007. They have not received a reply, and construction approval is still pending.

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house-of-prayer permits, which are required to open houses of worship. Local police have the authority to bring to court minority churches that operate or build places of worship without a permit. In practice, this happens rarely.

In November 2006, Nikodim Tsarknias, a former Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, appealed his sentence to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In May 2004, Tsarknias was sentenced to three months in prison, a sentence which was suspended by the Aridea Criminal Court of First Instance, on charges of establishing and operating a church without authorization, after he held Macedonian language religious services without a house of prayer permit. Tsarknias's sentence could not be further appealed in the country. The case was pending in the ECHR at the end of the reporting period.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. In contrast, Orthodox officials have an institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are legally recognized as a "known" religion, officials continued to harass members during the period covered by this report. This usually took the form of arbitrary identity checks (although Jehovah's Witnesses representatives reported that this problem has largely abated) and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship. In December 2006 the Supreme Administrative Court dismissed on non-substantive, technical grounds an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters. As a consequence, the case will be tried by other administrative courts. When the area was re-zoned, the Orthodox Church was exempt from the resulting re-zoning fees; Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that they should also be exempt.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religious affiliations. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers,

leading some members of other faiths who wished to advance professionally to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer. There were reports of pressure exerted on Orthodox military personnel, such as being passed over for promotion if they chose to marry non-Orthodox partners, or if they get married in non-Orthodox religious ceremonies.

Muslim citizens in Thrace were underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. While the under-representation was partly due to lower education level and limited Greek language ability of the available applicant pool, minority activists blamed the lack of transparency in the civil-service hiring process and endemic discrimination. Muslims claimed they were generally hired for lower-level positions. One Muslim minority member from Thrace held a seat in Parliament. In Xanthi and Komotini, Muslims held seats on the prefectural and town councils and served as local mayors. Thrace municipalities hired Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers and provided Turkish lessons for other civil servants. In January 2007, the Government announced it would establish a system for filling 0.5 percent of civil service jobs with Muslims. The Government had not yet implemented this system by the end of the reporting period.

The growing Muslim community in Athens did not have an official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. Members of the Muslim community used the official Muslim clerics in Thrace for official religious rites. Muslims in Athens and other cities traveled to Thrace or abroad for wedding ceremonies and some transported their deceased to Thrace or abroad for religious burials; those who could not afford to travel to Thrace had unrecognized religious rites performed. Remains buried in Greek cemeteries were subject to exhumation after three years, a practice overseen by municipalities because of limited space in cemeteries, especially in Attika. This practice has presented a problem for Muslims, as Islamic law does not permit exhumation of remains. The Orthodox Church also opposes cremation. The Mayor of Athens ordered the main cemetery of Athens to build a cremation facility. Construction had not started in the period covered by this report.

Although Parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in an Athens suburb, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. In October 2006 the Government passed legislation providing for the establishment of a mosque (without a cultural center) in the central Athens neighborhood of Votanikos, as opposed to the initial site chosen in an outlying suburb in Attica. Leaders of the local Muslim community have expressed satisfaction with the new location.

Differences remained within the Muslim minority community and between segments of the community and the Government regarding the means of selecting muftis. Under existing law, the Government appoints two muftis and one assistant mufti, all resident in Thrace. The Government maintained that it must appoint the muftis, as is the practice in Muslim countries, because, in addition to religious duties, they perform judicial functions under Muslim religious law for which the state pays them. The Government consults a committee of Muslim minority notables, which recommends candidates for the ten-year terms of office. Members of the Muslim minority objected to the fact that the Government was not legally obligated to follow the recommendation of the committee on the selection of the muftis. However, the Government follows the recommendations despite the absence of legal obligation.

Additionally, while some Muslims have accepted the authority of the two Government-appointed muftis, other Muslims have "elected" two muftis to serve their communities since they maintain that the Government of a non-Muslim country cannot appoint muftis. The Government does not recognize these muftis, and the muftis do not have the right to perform religious rites with attending civic powers such as weddings, divorces or rulings on inheritance rights. Courts have on several occasions prosecuted elected muftis for usurping the functions of the official (appointed) mufti. In July 2006, the ECHR ruled that these prosecutions had violated the rights of the elected Mufti of Xanthi, who passed away in September 2006. On December 31, 2006, a number of male Muslims in Thrace conducted an election to replace the late Mufti of Xanthi. Some criticized this procedure suggesting only a low number of men cast votes and that women were prohibited from voting. A portion of the Muslim minority continued to lobby the Government to allow for the direct election of muftis.

Controversy between the Muslim community and the Government also continued over the management and self-government of the wakfs. This involved the Government's appointment of officials to serve on administrative boards that govern each wakf and the degree and type of administrative control. In response to objections from some Muslims that the Government's appointment of these officials weakened the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violated the terms of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 Presidential decree placed the wakfs under the administration of an oversight committee appointed by the Government for three years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period has been extended every two years by Presidential decree.

In the past, Muslim activists have complained that the Government regularly lodges tax liens against the wakfs, although they are tax-free foundations in theory. In March 2007, the Government passed legislation writing off all tax liens against the wakfs amounting to approximately 6.5 million euros (8.4 million dollars) and eliminating future taxation of wakfs. The Government announced in January that it would allow the election of management boards by the community. Elections did not take place during the period covered by this report.

Members of missionary faiths reported police harassment and detention because of anti-proselytizing laws, but continued to note an improvement during the reporting period. Church officials from missionary faiths expressed concern that anti-proselytizing laws remained on the books, although such laws did not seriously hinder their activities. Police occasionally detained Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses for identity checks. In all cases, after one to several hours, the persons were released. Both groups report that the number of incidents of this kind of interference has decreased dramatically in recent years.

Some schoolbooks continued to carry negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. The Ombudsman wrote a letter to the Ministry of National Education and Religions expressing the hope that the Pedagogical Institute (the competent authority for schoolbooks) would proceed with the necessary revision of the controversial chapters in the new editions of the schoolbooks. On October 12, 2006, the Ombudsman wrote another letter to the Ministry of Education and Cults, requesting to be informed of what had become of his suggestions.

The intra-Orthodox doctrinal dispute between Esphigmenou monastery on Mt. Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate that administers the region under the 1924 Charter of Mt. Athos continued during the reporting period. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that ceased recognizing the authority of the Patriarchate in 1972. According to the Political Governor of the Holy Mountain of Athos, recognition and commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch is the sine qua non for existence on Athos. As a result, the Ecumenical Patriarchate requested the eviction of the monks, which was upheld by a Supreme Court ruling in 2003 but never implemented. The monks appealed the ruling but in March 2005 the Council of State declined to rule on the appeal on the grounds that it was not competent, under the Constitution, to judge the ecclesiastic and administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos. In late 2005 the Holy Community governing Mt. Athos appointed a new Esphigmenou monastic order, recognized by the Patriarchate, to replace the existing order. In October 2006 a Thessaloniki court convicted nine Esphigmenou monks for disturbing the peace and illegally occupying the monastery, giving each monk a two-year suspended sentence. In late 2006 seven monks were injured in clashes between the two monastic orders over control of Esphigmenou offices. The police did not intervene. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Esphigmenou monastery monks continue to occupy the monastery although they have lost legal access to assets and bank accounts of the monastery. Supporters of the monks claim that on the monastery's Feast Day in May 2007 the Coast Guard prevented pilgrims who had purchased ferry tickets to attend the feast at the monastery. The Political Governor stated that permission is not granted for people to visit the monastery because the remaining group of monks is legally and canonically incorrect. Supporters of the monks maintain that the Government is carrying out an embargo at the request of the Greek Orthodox Church Patriarch. Monks allege that the Government prevented food, medicine, medical personnel and pilgrims from reaching the monastery. Officials from the Orthodox Church and from the office of the Political Governor of the Holy Mountain of Athos strongly denied such charges and cited daily boat traffic that delivered food and medicine to the monastery as well as other sites at Mount Athos.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees, apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### Abuses of Religious Freedom

Most non-Orthodox religious leaders reported that their members (non-missionaries) did not encounter discriminatory treatment. Police occasionally detained Mormon missionaries (primarily from outside the EU who were undergoing the protracted residence permit process) usually after receiving complaints that the individuals engaged in proselytizing. In October 2006 police arrested and detained Mormon missionaries in Thessaloniki for two hours and then released them with no charges filed. Jehovah's Witnesses reported approximately 30 incidents of police detaining their members on suspicion of proselytizing during the reporting period. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reported that their interaction with the police improved during the reporting period because of government training and instruction given to police personnel, and training undertaken by the missionaries which taught them to steer clear of anti-proselytizing laws.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

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

#### Anti-Semitism

There were several instances of anti-Semitic articles or cartoons in the media. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greek Helsinki Monitor denounced the press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions in 2007. For example, on August 16, 2006, Eleftherotypia, the second largest daily newspaper, published a cartoon depicting an Israeli soldier praying with a rifle that was firing swastikas. Candidates for the political party LAOS made anti-Semitic statements during the campaign for

municipal offices in the fall of 2006. The party's weekly paper A1 published strongly anti-Semitic articles accusing the Israelis of genocide against the Lebanese people. A July 2006 editorial stated that anti-Semitic references as well as comparisons with the Holocaust were common in the press during the July-August 2006 conflict involving Israel and Lebanon, while some major media promoted the image of Israel as the "Nazi-state." On the other hand, Hezbollah fighters were often seen as "freedom fighters" and "resistance groups."

There were reports of vandalism of Jewish monuments. The Holocaust monument in Thessaloniki was vandalized during an antiwar demonstration in August 2006 and vandals destroyed the street signs at the square of Jewish Martyrs. In March 2007 swastikas appeared in a cemetery in Ioannina. In February 2007 swastikas were painted on an out-of-use synagogue in Veria, and, in August 2006 in Drama, on a Jewish monument. The Government condemned the vandalism. Police did not find the perpetrators.

Several times throughout the year, extreme right-wing groups painted anti-Semitic graffiti along with their symbols and organization names at multiple locations, including the Athens-Corinth and Athens-Tripoli highways, and other public structures. Unlike past years, authorities washed off the anti-Semitic graffiti in 2007. In February 2006, the prosecutor filed a lawsuit against the political party "Golden Dawn" for defacing public property and painting anti-Semitic graffiti during the course of the last several years on the basis of allegations submitted by the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), a local NGO. The Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and the GHM both submitted testimony.

The Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece and the GHM continued to protest the reference to the Easter tradition of the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew," by state agencies including the Athens News Agency, the National Tourism Organization, and Agrotouristiki. The Jewish Communities and the GHM maintained that this tradition propagated hatred and fanaticism against Jews. The Orthodox Church and the Wiesenthal Center wrote formal objections to this tradition. The Jewish Community also protested anti-Semitic passages in the Holy Week liturgy. The Jewish community reported that it remained in dialogue with the Orthodox Church about the removal of these passages.

There was no progress on negotiations between the Jewish community of Thessaloniki and the Government to find acceptable restitution for the community's cemetery, expropriated in 1944 after its destruction by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Aristotle University, a public institution, was later built on top of the cemetery. American Jewish NGOs have expressed concern that the municipality's construction of a subway and other facilities in the area might disturb the Jewish cemetery. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki accepts assurances from local authorities that current construction will not cross the boundaries of the cemetery. The Jewish Community is working with the University to appropriately memorialize the site's Jewish heritage, and ensure that future University construction does not disrupt the cemetery. Current construction practices maintain that excavations and construction of public works take place under the close supervision of archaeologists and other experts, to ensure the protection of the site. The Jewish community reported that virtually none of the publicly-owned Jewish cemeteries throughout the country were being properly maintained (e.g., the grass was not cut, the fences were not repaired, and plants were not watered), though maintenance is required under Greek law.

The Government co-sponsored commemorative events in Athens and Thessaloniki in January 2007 for Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Parliament Spokesperson made a keynote address at an event organized by the Central Board of Jewish Communities at Athens' main synagogue. At another ceremony attended by the Mayor of Athens and several high ranking government officials, the Central Board of Jewish Communities unveiled a plaque at the statue of occupation-era Orthodox Archbishop Damaskinos to honor him for his efforts to rescue Greek Jews. The Ministry of Education distributed materials to schools on the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on Holocaust Remembrance Day, and informed schools of educational courses available by the Jewish Museum of Athens. Some leaders of the Jewish community criticized the fact that Athens remained the only European city to have been under German occupation that does not have a memorial to the Holocaust.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In January 2007 the Government announced that it would hire 240 imams in Thrace and pay their salaries, establish a system to fill 0.5% of civil service jobs with Muslims, and write off tax liens on Muslim charitable foundations. These policies were not implemented by the end of the period covered by this report.

On the advice of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, in July 2006 the Ministry of Education put an end to the practice of permitting Orthodox priests to hear religious confessions from students in the public schools.

In June 2006 Parliament amended an existing law and abolished the practice by which the Ministry of Education and Religion sought the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop on whether to grant house of prayer permits for faiths other than Orthodox. Non-Orthodox faiths had objected to this practice.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some reports of societal discrimination.

The Greek Orthodox Church exercised significant social, political, and economic influence and owned a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property. Many Greeks assumed that any ethnic Greek was also an Orthodox Christian. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of minority faiths reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local Orthodox bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. However, with the exception of the burgeoning Muslim population, most members of minority faiths considered themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities was infrequent.

Orthodox Church leaders have publicly supported the building of a mosque in Athens, although they were opposed to the cultural center. The leaders were concerned about a potential hotbed of radical Islam in the center of the city. The plans for the new mosque approved by the Government do not include plans for a cultural center. The Orthodox Church offered the Muslim community in Athens a piece of land for the creation of a Muslim cemetery; as of the writing of this report, the transfer of the land has not yet occurred.

In July, a large unofficial mosque opened in the Moschato neighborhood of Athens and operates without a house of prayer permit. The renovation of an old factory for use as a mosque was reportedly financed by a Saudi Arabian businessman.

In December 2006, Hare Krishna followers reported that for the second time members of the Orthodox Church stood outside of a hall where they were celebrating a festival and distributed pamphlets that were derogatory of the Hare Krishna faith.

On February 20, 2007, vandals threw three Molotov cocktail bombs at a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Menidi, Athens. There was no damage. The police investigated the incident, but did not identify the perpetrators.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths increased social intolerance toward their religions. The Orthodox Church maintained a list of practices and religious groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Mormons, Baha'is, and others, which it believed to be sacrilegious. Officials of the Orthodox Church have acknowledged that they refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers; church leaders instructed Orthodox believers to shun members of these faiths.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers met with religious leaders and officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religion. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Mission also regularly discussed religious freedom issues in contacts with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, and members of Parliament. Officers from the Embassy and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki met regularly with representatives of various religious groups, and investigated complaints of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission attended Holocaust commemorations in Athens and the Consul General attended Thessaloniki events. U.S. officers continued to monitor the issue of restitution of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki. The American Embassy in Athens, the Consulate General in Thessaloniki and the U.S. Department of State in Washington have worked closely with the national and municipal Greek authorities as well as the Thessaloniki Jewish community and NGOs to assure the protection of human remains in the Thessaloniki Jewish cemetery. The Embassy, Consulate and Department have encouraged the Jewish community in its efforts to engage Aristotle University, a public institution built on top of the expropriated cemetery, to ensure that future University construction is conducted with proper supervision and knowledge of the community and to honor the history of the property by memorializing the Jewish heritage of the site in accordance with the community's wishes.

The U.S. Embassy actively followed issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The Embassy and Consulate General promoted and supported initiatives related to religious freedom. The Embassy and

Consulate General used the International Visitor program to introduce Muslim community leaders to the United States and American counterparts.

The Ambassador and U.S. officials regularly visited religious sites and conducted outreach throughout the country.

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