



## Belgium

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, government officials continued to have the authority to research and monitor religious groups that are not officially recognized.

Reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice continued. But these reports are often difficult to ascribe to a primary motivation of ethnicity or religious belief, as they are often inextricably linked.

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

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 11,780 square miles and a population of 10.5 million.

The Government does not keep statistics listing religious affiliation, but the population is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to a 2007 report of the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), 4.8 million inhabitants identify themselves as Catholic. Earlier statistics indicated that the number of nonbelievers is 924,000, and the number of those who identify themselves as belonging to the nonreligious philosophical community is 892,500.

The KBF Report gives the number of adherents belonging to smaller religious groups as follows: Islam, 400,000; Protestantism, 132,000; Orthodox, 70,000; Judaism, 50,000; Anglicanism 10,800, and organized secular humanism, 110,000. The larger nonrecognized religious groups include Jehovah's Witnesses with 23,701 baptized and 50,000 "churchgoers;" independent Protestant congregations, 10,000; Buddhists, 10,000; members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 4,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 2,000; Hindus, 5,000; Sikhs, 3,000; Hare Krishnas, 1,500; and the Church of Scientology, 200-300.

A 2008 Catholic University of Leuven report estimated that 7 percent of the Catholic population regularly attends religious services. Fifty-seven percent of the children born in the country are baptized, 26.7 percent of couples opt for a religious marriage, and 61 percent of funerals include religious services.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, government officials continued to have the authority to research and monitor religious groups that are not officially recognized.

The country formally joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research after resolving to deal with several funding issues in association with the

formation of a new Government in the summer of 2007.

The May 10, 2007 Anti-Discrimination Act outlaws discrimination on the grounds of religion or philosophical orientation, among other grounds.

The Government accords "recognized" status to Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Judaism, Anglicanism (separately from other Protestant groups), Islam, and Orthodox (Greek and Russian) Christianity. Representative bodies for these religious groups receive subsidies from the Government. The Government also supports the freedom to participate in secular organizations. These secular humanist groups serve as a seventh recognized philosophical community, and their organizing body, the Central Council of Non-Religious Philosophical Communities of Belgium, receives funds and benefits similar to those accorded other recognized religious groups.

The federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing religious groups and paying the wages and pensions of ministers of those groups. The federal Government also has jurisdiction over secular humanism. As a result of constitutional reform enacted in 2001, federal authorities devolved responsibility for ensuring religious instruction, financial accountability of religious groups, and religious buildings to other levels of government. For example, while parish operations and the upkeep of churches fall under municipal authorities, the provinces sustain the cost of mosques. At the same time, the Flemish, Francophone, and German-language community governments pay religious teacher salaries and the costs of public broadcasting.

In 2008 the federal Government paid \$160 million (€106 million) to the recognized religious groups. This sum included \$19.5 million (€13 million) to lay organizations and \$6.5 million (€4.3 million) to Islamic religious groups. For 2007 the federal budget outlays totaled \$142.5 million (€95 million). According to the Justice Ministry, the federal Government made salary payments to 2,854 Catholic priests, 113 Protestant/evangelical and 12 Anglican ministers, 29 rabbis, 46 Orthodox priests, and 250 lay consultants. The federal and regional authorities continued to deliberate with the Muslim Executive, which is the organizational body elected by the Muslim Executive Council, on the criteria for providing payments to Muslim clerics. In the absence of an agreement, no such payments were made during the period covered by this report. According to the CIFOP-ORACLE research institute, total outlays by all levels of government, excluding religious education, amounted to \$351 million (€234 million) in 2007. With pensions and tax waivers included, the total subsidy amounted to \$450 million (€300 million).

The Government applies five criteria in deciding whether to grant recognition to a religious group: the religion must have a structure or hierarchy; the group must have a sufficient number of members; the religion must have existed in the country for a long period of time; it must offer a social value to the public; and it must abide by the laws of the state and respect public order. These criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the sole responsibility of Parliament; however, Parliament generally accepts the decision of the Ministry of Justice. A group whose application is refused by the Ministry of Justice may appeal the decision to the Council of State.

During the period covered by this report the Walloon regional government recognized 43 mosques. The Flemish regional government recognized six mosques, and Brussels recognized five.

On November 7, 2006, a committee of experts appointed by the Justice Minister made some recommendations for amending the financing system. They refrained from advocating a complete overhaul, pointing out that a system whereby the individual taxpayer would make a contribution to the religious group of his choice might violate the Constitution and the prevailing privacy laws. After the general elections of June 10, 2007, representatives of the recognized religious groups and a person representing Buddhism met with formateur Didier Reynders, a Francophone senior politician tasked with conducting the government formation exploratory negotiations. The religious group representatives expressed concern about the growing complexity of the subsidization system. There was a consensus among the representatives that the time was ripe to start implementing the recommendations made by the committee of experts. When the Leterme Government took office March 22, 2008, it announced that it would take action on the financing issue. As a first step, the

Government allowed the Catholic Church to increase its number of parish assistants from 301 to 341. These assistants help the Church to better cope with the dwindling number of priests.

In his 2008 budget message, the Justice Minister announced that the Buddhist national secretariat would receive \$225,000 (€150,000), a subsidy for organizational support. The Justice Minister announced on the occasion that once all criteria were met, he would proceed with legislative steps to recognize Buddhism as a "non-confessional philosophical community," as the Buddhist community wanted. No progress was reported on the new Government's talks with other religious groups on ways to provide state financial support. The lack of recognized status does not prevent a religious group from practicing freely and openly. Thus, while unrecognized groups do not qualify for government subsidies, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

In 2007 the Muslim Executive became the subject of a fraud investigation. The Executive's Vice President was arrested, and a judicial investigation was started into the financial dealings of the chairman. On October 26, 2007, 10 of the 17 members of the Executive failed to win a vote of confidence. After the vote of no-confidence, Justice Minister Jo Vandeuren suspended subsidization. On February 22, 2008, the Executive failed to name new members and went in to receivership. On March 14, 2008, the Muslim General Council met and elected a new Executive, and appointed Semsettin Urgulu chairman of the Executive. Justice Minister Vandeuren told a parliamentary committee that since 1999 the Muslim Executive had received \$9.6 million (€6.4 million). The Federation of Belgian Mosques, an organization critical of the Executive, argued that there was a need to elect a completely new body of Muslim representatives, without interference from abroad or from the Government.

The Flemish and Francophone regional governments, in association with the Muslim Executive Council, set academic benchmarks for imams at the same level as for ministers of other recognized religious groups.

In 1993 the Government established by law the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Struggle against Racism (CEOR). Commonly known as the Anti-Racism Center, it is an independent agency responsible for addressing through litigation all types of discrimination, including religious. Although formally part of the Office of the Prime Minister, it is under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Integration. Its head is appointed by the Prime Minister for six years, but the Prime Minister may not remove the individual once appointed.

In 2006 the Ministry of Justice introduced a mechanism to identify racist, xenophobic, or homophobic offenses, thus making it easier to prosecute discrimination as a criminal act. The Minister decided to appoint a magistrate in each judicial district in charge of monitoring racism and discrimination cases. In addition, the College of Prosecutors General, a government body on which senior prosecutors serve, issued a directive on identifying violations of antiracism and antidiscrimination legislation.

The Government observes Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Assumption, and All Saints' Day as national holidays.

Federal law prohibits public statements that incite national, racial, or religious hatred, including denial of the Holocaust. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is one year's imprisonment.

In 2005 the Center for Equal Opportunity issued a comprehensive report on public symbols of religious and philosophical convictions. The report found that neither the Flemish nor the Francophone educational authorities imposed restrictions, and it was left to individual schoolmasters to decide which symbols would be tolerated. Most schoolmasters in the country imposed a headscarf ban on both pupils and teachers. A survey released in 2006 showed that 90 percent of the non-Catholic schools in the Francophone community did not permit the headscarf. Schools on both sides of the country's linguistic border allowed free days for attending religious festivals. Catholic educational institutions, the largest educational system in the country, allowed the wearing of religious symbols. Schoolmasters also refused to permit the use of religious objections against attendance in specific courses, notably including physical education classes.

In 2006 the appeal board of the Brussels public schools ruled against reinstating two teachers who had been dismissed for wearing a headscarf. The headscarf, it was argued, was against the school system's dress policy.

On October 23, 2007, the Council of State ruled that an individual school had overstepped its jurisdiction when it terminated the contract of a religion teacher who was wearing a headscarf outside the school building. According to the Council of State, jurisdiction in this matter belonged to the national public schools authority. In another case, the Antwerp Appellate Court upheld a verdict of a lower court arguing that a headscarf ban is not discriminatory.

The regional and community government ministers responsible for school and local government oversight refrained from intervening in the headscarf debate, leaving it to individual schools and municipalities to make their own decisions.

The public educational system, from kindergarten to university, requires strict neutrality of presentation of religious views for teaching personnel, except for teachers of religion. Religious or "moral" instruction is mandatory in public schools and is provided according to the student's religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools provide teachers for each of the six recognized religious groups, if a sufficient number of pupils wish to attend. Public school religion teachers are nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the Minister of Education of the concerned community government. Private authorized religious schools that follow the same curriculum as public schools are known as "free" schools. They receive community government subsidies for operating expenses and buildings. Teachers, like other civil servants, are paid by their respective community governments.

The Government and banks agreed to pay \$170 million (€110 million) in restitution to Jews whose property was looted by Nazi occupying forces during World War II.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, government officials continued to have the authority to research and monitor religious groups that are not officially recognized.

As a result of a 1997 parliamentary committee report, Parliament passed a law establishing two bodies: a group monitoring "harmful sects" and an interagency coordinating group on "harmful sects." The first body, the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN), collects publicly available information on a wide range of religious and philosophical groups and provides information to the public and, upon request, gives advice to the authorities on sectarian organizations. Since its inception, the CIAOSN has opened more than 750 files concerning sectarian organizations. The Center's library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general, as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public. Despite its name, regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful. Unlike the Anti-Racism Center, this body cannot initiate litigation.

The second body established by Parliament, the Interagency Coordination Group, deals primarily with confidential material and works with the legal and security institutions of the Government to coordinate government policy. Pursuant to a 2005 Royal Decree the group's composition was changed to include representatives from the College of Prosecutors General; the Federal Prosecuting Office; the Federal Police; State Security; Defense Intelligence; and the Justice, Interior, Foreign, and Finance Ministries. The Coordinating Group's executive board meets quarterly and reports to the full group. It produces no publicly available reports. The Government designated the federal prosecutor and a magistrate in each of the 27 judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

Members of the Parliamentary Investigatory Committee on Sects (PICS) raised concern about the effectiveness of the Interagency Coordination Group as well as the College of Prosecutors General, which had no official guidelines for prosecuting offenders.

Most queries handled by the CIAOSN in 2007 concerned physical welfare and therapeutic organizations (15 percent), Protestant denominations (13.5 percent), Oriental religious groups (10.5 percent), small religious groups (6 percent), New Age groups (6 percent), the Church of Scientology (5.5 percent), Catholic and dissident Catholic organizations (4 percent), and Jehovah's Witnesses (4 percent).

On February 29, 2008, confirming a summary trial ruling of 2006, a Brussels Court established in a final ruling that CIAOSN had wrongly identified Sahaya Yoga as a dangerous sect in one of its publications. The court argued the advice was not properly documented, and Sahaya Yoga had suffered damage by appearing in the CIAOSN publication. The court ordered the CIAOSN to make public the ruling and to inform its website and annual report readers, which CIAOSN is undertaking during the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period a number of parliamentarians argued that the CIAOSN failed to meet the goals set at its inception because of inadequate funding.

Created in 2002, the Federal Prosecuting Office continues to hold open several cases involving sectarian organizations which, in a next step, will be forwarded to the Chamber of Indictment. Parliament remained undecided about amending the criminal code to include a special section on "offenses committed by sectarian organizations." In the absence of such special legislation, sectarian organizations can be investigated on such grounds as embezzlement, money laundering, abuse of confidence, misappropriation of wills, illegal medical practice, and fraud under existing laws.

In 2006 the country's highest court ruled that Parliament's immunity could not be subjected to restrictions, after the President of the Chamber of Representatives argued that a 2005 ruling, regarding damages the Church of the Kingdom of God suffered by appearing in a parliamentary report, undermined the legislative authority and independence of lawmakers.

In keeping with trends seen across Europe of role reversal of 19th-century missionary activity, PICS mentioned in its 2006 report an increasing number of queries about organizations originating from Northern American Protestant and African evangelical movements.

PICS noted that since it was established in 1999 the queries from the public had shifted from questions about sectarian organizations to organizations whose focus is on mental and physical healing and were generated by a rapidly growing number of groups, often hard to identify.

In its recommendations, PICS requested that brainwashing and mental manipulation be established as criminal offenses. In keeping with the committee's recommendation, Members of Parliament in 2008 announced plans to submit draft legislation aimed at including an additional chapter in the criminal code regarding "abuse of an individual's ignorance or weakness."

On several occasions in 2007, a Member of Parliament raised concern about a company having provided computer courses to Belgian ministerial departments and the Flemish regional parliament. He alleged that the company was linked to the Church of Scientology International (CSI). He also expressed concern about Narconon, an organization linked to CSI that seeks to enter schools with an antidrug campaign.

On September 4, 2007, the spokesperson for the Federal Prosecuting Office announced that the Federal Prosecutor would soon forward to the Chamber of Indictments a brief against the Scientology Church of Belgium based on a 10-year investigation of the group. According to the spokesperson, the Federal Prosecutor would seek indictment of 12 persons, the Scientology Church of Belgium, and the Human Rights Office of the Church. Following the announcement by the Federal Prosecuting Office, the local Scientology Church issued a statement saying that the Church was the victim of a climate of intolerance and discrimination created by the courts.

On April 25, 2008, the Federal Prosecutor announced that the country's branch of the Church was the subject of another judicial investigation. The group was charged with recruiting volunteers under the false pretense of offering work contracts. At the end of the reporting period, legal proceedings continued in the two cases.

In 2006 the Brussels First Instance court sentenced Luong Minh Dang, the founder of Spiritual Human Yoga (SHY), and his former representative in the country to 4 years' imprisonment, with a suspended sentence for half of its term, and a \$2,600 fine (€2,000) for forgery, swindling, illegal use of medicine, and criminal conspiracy. The trial concerned the two defendants personally, not SHY as an organization. The court issued an international arrest warrant against Dang, who had left the country. The defendants appealed the court ruling; the case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by the report.

At the end of the reporting period, the case involving an Aramaic Catholic priest's remarks criticizing Islam on television in 2002 was still pending. On January 11, 2007, the Charleroi Chamber of Indictment formally indicted the priest for violation of antiracism legislation in connection with his remarks. On April 2, 2007, a higher court refused to overturn the indictment.

Some school authorities restricted Muslim girls from wearing the headscarf in public schools.

In 2007 a few municipalities, including the cities of Antwerp and Ghent, decided to impose a women's headscarf ban for those municipal employees directly dealing with the public. The measures resulted in acrimonious debates in both cities. Because of the controversy, most municipal authorities opted against imposing the ban. The Antwerp ban was on symbols of religious, political, or philosophical beliefs, including headscarves and crucifixes. As a compromise, women employed with the city nurseries were allowed to cover their hair with bandanas.

#### Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

On April 10, 2008, 15 policemen, accompanied by the prosecutor and the investigating judge, searched a local branch of the Church of Scientology in Brussels. The Scientologists reported that the authorities confiscated the church's records and laptops as well as personal communications equipment, such as laptops and cell phones, from those present. They also reported that police searched individuals present. The office was closed for approximately five weeks during the initial investigation. A few days later the Federal Prosecuting Office announced that the local branch was being charged with recruiting volunteers under the false pretense of offering work contracts. The federal prosecutor said the investigation continues, but, as of the end of this reporting period, there have been no indictments. The federal prosecutor's office spokesperson said all materials for worship which may have been taken for the investigation were returned.

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

On March 12, 2008, the Government and banks agreed to pay \$170 million (€130 million) to compensate Jews whose property was looted by the Nazi occupying forces during World War II. Under the arrangement, \$54 million (€41 million) will be paid to Holocaust survivors while the rest will go to a foundation to help needy families of victims and toward efforts to assure that the Holocaust is remembered.

#### *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.

### **Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination**

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Jewish and Muslim groups reported incidents of discrimination, as did religious groups that had not been accorded official recognition by the Government.

The Jewish community registered 68 anti-Semitic incidents during 2007, compared to 66 the previous year. There were 31 incidents during the first half of 2008. The CEOOR counted 66 incidents in 2007 with most incidents taking place in Brussels and Antwerp. The reports noted no physical violence, but there was a significant increase in Internet incidents (hate messages, 40 percent of all incidents). Shouting abuse and issuing threats was the second most reported category of incidents.

On March 23, 2008, approximately 20 Jewish children were threatened by a man and his two dogs on an Antwerp playground. He shouted abuse and the police were called to stop the man. The police made a report of the incident. In February 2008 there were several incidents involving local Antwerp youths shouting abuse at students of the local yeshiva (school for talmudic studies). Some of the youths were arrested. On December 4 and 5, 2007, stones were thrown at an Antwerp synagogue and several windows were smashed. In one such incident the police managed to arrest the perpetrators. At a ceremony organized by the Forum of Jewish Organizations on October 28, 2007, Antwerp Mayor Patrick Janssens offered an apology to the Jewish community for the city's involvement in the deportation of Jews. Janssens' initiative was derided by Bart De Wever, President of the New Flemish Alliance political party. De Wever argued that the apology was politically motivated and was coming too late. Janssens later apologized and met with the Antwerp leaders of the Forum of Jewish Organizations.

In 2007 procedural hearings continued in the case of Roeland Raes, a former vice chairman and senator of the far-right Flemish Vlaams Belang party. The proceeding started in March 2007 and charged Raes with denying the Holocaust during a 2001 television broadcast. Federal law prohibits public statements that incite national, racial, or religious hatred, including denial of the Holocaust. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is one year's imprisonment.

On March 9, 2008, police arrested two teenagers for the murder of a famous Israeli pianist, Benjamin Rawitz, whose body was found two years earlier in the cellar of his Brussels apartment.

On February 23, 2008, while Jewish boys were playing in their schoolyard in Antwerp, two unidentified youngsters threw plastic bottles and detonators at them.

On February 22, 2008, a Jewish woman in Antwerp was threatened by her neighbor with anti-Semitic insults, threats to beat her, and deaths threats as she was leaving a store. She asked a bystander to accompany her home and lodged a complaint. The cashier and store manager agreed to testify in her favor.

On February 17, 2008, a soccer game between Maccabi Antwerp and Sint Katelijne Waver in Antwerp ended in fighting prompted by anti-Semitic comments made by a 16-year-old player.

On February 11, 2008, an Auschwitz-born U.S. professor reported that he was kicked out of a restaurant in Bruges because he was Jewish.

On February 2, 2008, an Orthodox Jewish man was exiting his vehicle at a gas station in Brussels when four teenagers surrounded him. They became aggressive and threatening, but a few persons chased them away before they could hurt him.

On December 6, 2007, one of Antwerp's two main synagogues was vandalized. Nine days later, there was an attempt to torch a synagogue in Antwerp.

On November 4, 2007, a Holocaust memorial in Brussels was desecrated.

On September 17, 2007, four young men approached a 14-year-old Jewish youth, who was on his way home from Jewish school. They threatened the boy, who, not understanding what they meant, kept on walking. After they shouted an ethnoreligious epithet at him, the Jewish youth punched one of them in the face.

On September 14, 2007, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, police arrested three men of North African appearance for repeatedly threatening and yelling anti-Semitic insults at a group of worshippers who were performing the act of Tashlikh, as a part of Rosh Hashanah prayers, in an Antwerp park.

On September 10, 2007, the chair of a congregation found a letter written in Dutch that was addressed to the synagogue's rabbi. It stated that for more than 60 years the Jews had presented themselves as the victims, while the victims are the mothers and children in the Middle East. A drawing of a dead man's head appeared on the envelope.

In September 2007, between the two days of Rosh Hashanah, a red lamp (of the type used on streets to

indicate a brothel) was placed near the gate of a synagogue in Ostend. A complaint was made about the desecration of a sacred place.

On July 6, 2007, the secretary of a Jewish community facility in Brussels received a telephone call from a person with an Israeli accent who made insulting anti-Semitic comments, stated he was a member of al-Qa'ida, and that the building was about to blow up. Following the phone call, the police were immediately contacted and they conducted a search of the place.

Antwerp police reported that a group of 16-year-olds verbally insulted and threatened local yeshiva boys, at approximately 7 p.m. on a recurring basis, for many months. The boys filed complaints with the police who were closely monitoring the situation.

During the period covered by this report, several international organizations that monitor anti-Semitic activity reported that some members of the Jewish community found hurtful and offensive numerous anti-Semitic remarks made by individuals in public places.

During the period covered by this report, there were numerous instances of anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial statements on the radio, internet, and in books and newspapers, which some members of the Jewish community found hurtful and offensive. These complaints included an anti-Semitic caricature in the Flemish-language satirical newspaper, *T'scheldt*, anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial books and stickers sold in bookstores, anti-Semitic comments in newspaper articles, and two anti-Semitic and Holocaust denying web links found on Ghent University's website.

Some proeuthanasia activists complained that Catholic hospitals failed to implement the euthanasia act, but a survey concluded that euthanasia was available in most Catholic hospitals.

In 2007 CEOOR received a total of 170 complaints of religious discrimination. These religion-based cases represented 13.7 percent of all complaints; most concerned discrimination against Muslims.

On February 10, 2008, approximately 30 persons participated in Brussels in an anti-Scientology rally organized by Anonymous, an Internet-based group.

There is an annual general assembly of the National Ecumenical Commission to discuss various religious themes. The Catholic Church sponsors working groups at the national level to maintain dialogue and promote tolerance among all religious groups. At the local level, Catholic dioceses established commissions for interfaith dialogue. The president of the National Ecumenical Commission, a Catholic organization, maintains contacts with leaders of other religious groups, including both recognized and unrecognized religious organizations.

Several nongovernmental organizations acting are active in promoting religious freedom. Among the most prominent are the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia; the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme; Human Rights without Frontiers; and the Liga voor Mensenrechten.

A Moroccan youth had to appear in court on April 21, 2008, for having beaten a Moroccan girl who wore no headscarf. The youth was acquitted because of conflicting evidence.

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

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

U.S. Embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with officials from the Prime Minister's office; the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Social Integration, and Interior; members of Parliament; and regional and local officials.

Embassy officials expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents and urged the Government to intensify

its efforts to counter them. Following Embassy engagement with both federal and language community officials and supporting the efforts of the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the country formally joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research after resolving to deal with several funding issues in association with the formation of a new Government in the summer of 2007.

The Embassy hosted individual interfaith events to encourage dialogue among citizens and with the U.S. Government. Embassy officials also met with representatives of both recognized and nonrecognized religious groups, particularly those that reported some form of discrimination during the period covered by this report.

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