



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

France

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some religious groups remain concerned about legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provided for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public school employees and students. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and state prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. A law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students entered into force in September 2004. Despite significant efforts by the Government to combat anti-Semitism and an overall decline in the number of incidents, anti-Semitic attacks persisted. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES). Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions, and that public statements from the new president indicated the organization would take a harder line against minority religions. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief issued a report indicating that the Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion or belief, but expressed concern about the application of the 1905 law, the treatment of cult groups and certain new religious movements, and the 2004 legislation regarding religious symbols in schools.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to freedom of religion. Anti-Semitic incidents dropped by 48 percent in 2005, but incidents persisted, most notably the kidnapping, torture, and killing of a twenty-three-year-old Jewish man. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize strongly anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government provided increased security for Jewish institutions.

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 211,209 square miles and a population of approximately 62.9 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government did not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to press reports, only 12 percent of the population attended religious services of any faith more than once per month. In a poll released in December 2004, 64.3 percent of the respondents indicated they were Catholic, even if they never attended religious services. Another 27 percent polled stated they had no religious affiliation, while 8.7 percent cited another religious affiliation. Of those who identified themselves as something other than Catholic, 49.4 percent were Muslim, 21.8 percent were Protestant, 7 percent were Jewish, and 21.8 percent indicated "other." A February 2004 poll indicated that 60 percent of those interviewed believed in God, and 12 percent attended religious services often. The vast majority of the population was nominally Roman Catholic, but according to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population were practicing Catholics. Muslims constituted the second largest religious group. There were an estimated five to six million individuals of Muslim origin in the country (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these were practicing Muslims varied widely. Protestants made up 2 percent of the population, the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represented 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent. According to various estimates, approximately 6 percent of the country's citizens were unaffiliated with any religion.

The Jewish community numbered approximately 600,000. According to press reports, at least 60 percent were not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews were Orthodox. There were small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that 250,000 persons attended their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians numbered between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority was associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church.

Other religions present in the country included evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches was growing, in large part because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there were approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology had an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. A long history of conflict between religious groups and between the Church and the French Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and state, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith. Of the country's ten national holidays, five were Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register, but may apply for tax-exempt status or to gain official recognition if they so wish. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations cultuelles (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and associations culturelles (cultural associations, which are normally not exempt from taxes). Associations in these two categories are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. A cultural association may engage in profit-making activity. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations, such as schools. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories; the Mormons, for example, run strictly religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school under their cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply to the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and to receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose for existence. To qualify, the group's purpose must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Approximately one hundred Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than fifty associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightened restrictions on associations and provided for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violation of another person's freedom, dignity, or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central Government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and state. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris Grand Mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements to enter the country must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain in the country longer than ninety days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a carte de séjour (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time) and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular. In March 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, and large crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in September 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but facts about religions are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home-school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. The Government subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with religious organizations.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and through encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the French Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003, a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature; the law classifies racist motivations for violent acts as aggravating circumstances and mandates harsher punishment for these crimes. March 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these laws in prosecuting anti-Semitic crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops.

The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises sixteen churches and sixty associations. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community. It also acts as an interlocutor with the Government.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes the Jewish "worship associations" from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943, Jewish members of the French Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The national French Council of the Muslim Faith and twenty-five affiliated regional councils serve as interlocutors for the Muslim community with local and national officials on such civil-religious issues as mosque construction, providing chaplains for prisons and the military, and certification of halal butchers. In November 2004, then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of a Foundation for French Islam to assist in the funding of mosques, provide a transparent vehicle for individual and foreign donations, and assist in the training of foreign imams in the French language, history, and civics; however, it suffers from a lack of foreign or private funding. The Government's goal was to establish the organization, with funding to come from the members. Government interest in the project could be flagging because of a change in ministers.

The MIVILUDES is charged with observing and analyzing "sect/cult" movements that constitute a threat to public order or that violate law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by "cults," informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, visited the country in September 2005 and issued a report on her findings in March 2006. While the special rapporteur indicated that the Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion or belief, she noted several areas of concern. Regarding the 1905 law separating church and state, the special rapporteur recognized that while the law guarantees in principle the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief, she stated that "in some circumstances, the selective interpretation and rigid application of this principle has operated at the expense" of religious freedom. The special rapporteur considered that "the policy of the Government may have contributed to a climate of general suspicion and intolerance" towards religious groups listed in a 1995 parliamentary report as "cults." She noted that authorities had "adopted a more balanced approach" in recent years towards groups considered cults and judged that MIVILUDES was an improvement over the anti-cult organization it replaced in 2002. However, the special rapporteur added that because of staffing changes after she completed her visit, "MIVILUDES was allegedly about to return to a more hard-line position" regarding alternative and minority religions. The special rapporteur found that, while the March 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools can "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf or other religious symbols," it also acted to deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious belief," and that "the stigmatization of the headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In March 2004, on the recommendation of an inter-ministerial commission established by the president to study secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country, the Government passed a law prohibiting the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols - including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses - by employees and students in public schools. In June 2004, the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law did not violate the freedom of religion; the law was implemented in September 2004. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. Following the enactment of the law, media reports indicated that Muslim girls and Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violating this law; all had reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group, however, indicated that the law adversely affected many more Muslim girls, whether by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimated that, of the 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wore veils. The Sikh community reported that, of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 84 percent were affected by the legislation.

In 2005, the Paris Court of Appeals rejected a telemarketing firm's appeal of a 2003 ruling in favor of a young woman who sought reinstatement, damages, and interest after she was fired by the telemarketing firm for refusing to wear her headscarf in a manner deemed appropriate by her employer.

Some Muslim and Sikh groups protested the government policy prohibiting the wearing of head coverings in national identity photos. A case brought before the country's highest court for administrative matters by a Sikh wishing to be permitted to wear his turban in driver's license and passport photos was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The Sikhs, who lost the case in March 2006, filed complaints with the French High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality, and with the European Commission, for indirect discrimination against individuals and a group of individuals in contravention of various European laws.

In July 2004, Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons." Abdelkader Bouziane, an imam, was deported from the country in October 2004, accused of publicly justifying wife-beating in an article.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers "cults." Mass suicides in 1994 by members of the Order of the Solar Temple led to heightened public concern about "cult" behavior. In 1996, a parliamentary commission studying so-called cults publicly released a report that identified 173 groups as "cults," including the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity. In May 2005, then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a circular indicating that the parliamentary list should no longer be used to identify "sects" and directed

authorities to focus their efforts instead on those sects that represent the greatest threat, notably those "small, fluid" groups that are "less easily identifiable" and that use the Internet for recruitment. Some religious groups hailed the move as a step forward but called for the Ministry of Justice to issue a circular to rescind repressive measures against minority religions.

On April 16, 2006, MIVILUDES published its report for 2005, noting continued concern about the activities of groups it considers "cults." According to MIVILUDES President Jean-Michel Roulet, "There are real and good reasons not to give up the fight against sectarian abuses on the fallacious grounds that this represents an attack on the freedom of religion." The 176-page report cited three primary areas of concern: protecting children from cult influences, both from parents who may be involved in the groups and from attempts by groups to recruit young members; curbing demand for "alternative medicines" and spiritual healers; and preventing sects' use of natural disasters and humanitarian aid to promote their public image and proselytize their beliefs. The report specifically cited the Church of Scientology as being present in France's suburbs following last fall's unrest there, distributing copies of their booklet "The Path of Happiness" and reaching out to youth. Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report were unsubstantiated and often false, adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved. Groups also expressed concern about comments made by Roulet, often specifically citing the Church of Scientology, and promising to increase efforts against minority religions.

In January 2005, MIVILUDES published a guide for public servants instructing them how to spot and combat "dangerous" sects. In several instances, the law regarding the right of patients to refuse medical treatment, as well as subsequent court decisions, was noted. The Jehovah's Witnesses were mentioned as an organization that refused blood transfusions, and there was mention of Health Ministry guidance to encourage treatment while respecting patient wishes. Some groups expressed concern that this guide would be misused by overzealous public servants against legitimate religious organizations.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard law, which permits the dissolution of religious groups, if it is established that group practices are believed to violate basic rights. In 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it. The law remained in force. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time against the leader of a "cult." Arnaud Mussy, the founder and spiritual head of the group Neo-Phare, was convicted in November 2004 of fraudulent abuse of the state of ignorance and the weakness of four followers. Mussy claimed to be the reincarnation of Christ and made several predictions in 2000 regarding the pending apocalypse; one of his adherents killed himself, and two other followers attempted suicide allegedly because of their states of mind brought on by Mussy's manipulation. He appealed the decision.

On June 28, 2006, the National Assembly passed a law creating a Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Influence of Sects on Minors, the third parliamentary commission in eleven years set up to investigate sects. According to the sponsors of the bill, the committee would seek to investigate both the "insidious means" by which sects seek to proselytize youth, as well as any resultant negative effects on young people's physical and psychological well-being.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. In 2003, the Court of Appeals of Paris fined the Paris-region Spiritual Association of the Church of Scientology approximately \$6,100 (5,000 euros) for breaking a law on information privacy; the decision was appealed. Church of Scientology representatives reported that a case filed by a parent whose child attended an "Applied Scholastics"-based school was resolved when the young woman, previously prevented by the Government from leaving the country to attend the school abroad, decided she would wait until she reached the age of eighteen and could legally make the decision herself. In March 2004, the police intelligence agency, Renseignements Generaux (RG), was instructed by the Administrative Tribunal of Paris to comply with a 2003 decision by the Council of State to provide the Church of Scientology with its files on the group, or be fined. The RG had refused to accede to the Church of Scientology's request since 2000, citing "public safety" concerns.

The Church of Scientology also argued that numerous remarks by Jean-Michel Roulet, since his October 2005 installation as the president of MIVILUDES, were "rife with false and derogatory information...[which] makes it impossible for MIVILUDES to function in an objective and neutral manner." Scientology representatives characterized Mr. Roulet's statements as "a return to discriminatory government policies...designed to...stigmatize and denigrate targeted minority faiths in France." In addition, they criticized his February 2006 letter to France's Superior Audiovisual Council (CSA in French), which alerted CSA authorities that a public service announcement that had been broadcast on French television had in fact been provided by the Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI), which is affiliated with the Church of Scientology. After receipt of Roulet's letter, according to the Scientologists, the CSA acted to censor the public service announcements by warning stations of their origin (the link between YHRI and Scientology is clear on the website indicated on the website address provided on the box containing the DVD of the PSA). The Scientologist's attorney pointed out that this type of censorship had occurred only in France.

Scientologists in the country reported many other cases of discrimination. In one, the spokesperson for the Church in the country, Danielle Gounord, was summoned to appear before the police on January 31, 2006, and told that the magistrate who headed the "Sect Mission" within the Justice Ministry's Department of Criminal Affairs and Pardon had filed a report claiming harassment against her. The Magistrate, Marie-Jose Aube Lotte, based her claim of harassment on letters received from Gounord, on an article Gounord wrote, and on a question that Gounord posed to Lotte at a seminar in the Senate. According to the Scientologist's attorney, in no case had Gounord said, done, or written anything in contravention of any law.

On December 14, 2005, a Paris court rejected a lawsuit brought by a collective of associations asking for the dissolution of the National Union of Associations for the Defense of the Family (UNADFI). The organizations accused UNADFI, a state-subsidized NGO "specializing in information about sects," of regularly overstepping its informative role and acting against religious freedom. Instead, the court ruled that the suit constituted an "abusive procedure" and ordered the plaintiffs to pay UNADFI \$18,000 (15,000 euros) in damage and court costs and ordered the plaintiffs to print the decision in eight newspapers. The plaintiffs planned to appeal the decision.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups. In October 2004, the

Association of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their appeal to the Court of Cassation on a 2002 ruling that they must pay back taxes currently totaling nearly \$51,135,000 (40,908,000 euros). The members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult, because of their placement on the 1996 parliamentary list, and that authorities adopted a new administrative regulation to retroactively tax "manual donations" offered by adherents. The association further alleged that this tax had not been applied to any other nonprofit or religious organization, and the amount of the tax exceeds the assets of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. The Association of Jehovah's Witnesses has refused to pay what it considers an unjust tax. On February 25, 2005, the case was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Vosges Department reported difficulty gaining permission to build a house of worship in the town of Deyvilliers, and at the end of a reporting period a court case was pending before an administrative court. Jehovah's Witnesses also reported several acts of vandalism, including the burning of a car and the arson of a house of worship. On December 1, 2005, the Paris Court of Appeal overturned a 2001 decision and ordered the Ministry of Interior to turn over to the Jehovah's Witnesses documents relating to the 1996 parliamentary report and to pay \$1,800 (1,500 euros) for costs. The Ministry of Interior's appeal of the decision was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

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

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

On February 13, 2005, the first death linked to anti-Semitism since 1995 occurred when authorities discovered the beaten and burned body of Ilan Halimi, a twenty-three-year-old Jewish man who was kidnapped and tortured to death by a gang in the southern Paris suburb of Bagneux. Halimi was approached by a young woman at his place of work and kidnapped when he went to meet her on January 20. One of the suspects in custody for the crime admitted to authorities that Halimi had been targeted "because he is Jewish, and because Jews are rich." The gang, which referred to themselves as "The Barbarians," demanded as much as \$600,000 (500,000 euros) for his release and reportedly told his family to "ask synagogues for the money" when told that the family did not have enough money. The gang leader and self-proclaimed "Brain of the Barbarians," Youssef Fofana, fled to Cote d'Ivoire shortly after Halimi's body was discovered and was later extradited to France. At the end of the reporting period at least twenty-one persons, including Fofana and the woman who lured Halimi, were in custody or awaiting charges for the kidnapping and killing of Halimi, which was classified by the Justice Ministry as a hate crime bearing the "aggravated circumstance of anti-Semitism."

Authorities reacted strongly to Halimi's killing, although some members of Halimi's family accused the police of moving too slowly and initially disregarding the anti-Semitic dimension of the crime. President Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, opposition political figures, and Muslim and Christian religious leaders attended a memorial for Ilan Halimi February 24 at a Paris synagogue. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, and European Minister Catherine Colonna were among the estimated 33,000-200,000 people who attended a February 26 march organized by the CRIF and NGOs SOS-Racisme and the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) to honor Halimi and show solidarity against racism and anti-Semitism.

Following the Halimi killing there was a spate of anti-Semitic incidents in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles, where Jews make up approximately 20 percent of the 58,000 residents. According to press reports, the perpetrators in these incidents were of sub-Saharan African and Maghreb origin. On March 3, 2006 a local rabbi's seventeen-year-old son was attacked by two men of African origin near a synagogue, suffering a broken nose. That same day, an eighteen-year-old man was assaulted by a group of five men, who insulted him and stole his cell phone. On March 4, a twenty-eight-year-old man was attacked by four assailants, suffering a dislocated shoulder. The four responsible for the attack were arrested. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy met with the families of all three victims, calling anti-Semitism "a stain on the national flag" and announcing a reinforcement of local police forces and video surveillance in the area.

In July 2005, three youths threw bottles of acid into the courtyard of a Jewish school in Paris. No injuries were reported. The three minors were released into judicial custody, and their trial remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2005, the CRIF condemned the sale of anti-Semitic cassettes by the Committee for the Well-being and Rescue for Palestinians at the annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF). The president of the UOIF called the situation "regrettable" and lamented that the situation had not been brought to his attention earlier, so as to prevent the dissemination. He stated, "We cannot tolerate the sale of such cassettes, this is an incitation to racial hatred, an incitation against religions. This is unacceptable."

In November 2004, a group of students visiting Auschwitz were accused of inappropriate behavior, including running, throwing snowballs, smiling next to pictures of deportees, and in the case of one student, making comments that approved of the Nazis' actions. In January 2005, an appeals court rejected the appeals of two of the disciplined students, upholding the permanent expulsion for the student who made the remarks, and confirming a fifteen-day suspension for another student.

In October 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called comments by Radio France International editor Alain Menargues "unacceptable." Menargues called Israel a "racist" state while publicizing his book on the West Bank security barrier. As a result of the controversy surrounding his remarks, Menargues resigned.

In October 2004, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, member of the European Parliament, and vice president of the

extreme-right National Front, made several comments regarding the Holocaust to the media, questioning the use of gas chambers and stating, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate on it." In March 2005, the disciplinary committee at the university where he was teaching banned him from teaching there for five years for contesting crimes against humanity; on May 22, the National Council of Higher Education's disciplinary committee confirmed the expulsion. On May 23, Gollnisch's trial on charges of contesting crimes against humanity was postponed until November 7. The European Parliament lifted Gollnisch's parliamentary immunity on December 13, 2005.

On Sunday May 28, 2006, approximately thirty young men marched down a symbolically significant street in Paris' traditional Jewish quarter yelling "death to the Jews" and other anti-Semitic insults. The men, of African origin, were seeking a confrontation with members of the Betar youth movement and the Jewish Defense League. The incident lasted an estimated fifteen minutes. Although there was no violence, many Jewish residents and shopkeepers in the area complained of intimidation. The National Office of Vigilance against Anti-Semitism filed a complaint with police, who opened an investigation. The gang warned it would return every Sunday but had not returned again in the period covered by this report.

The men were believed to belong to Tribu KA, a thirty-member group of extremist blacks, created in 2004 and known to police for their racist rhetoric against Jews and whites. Its leader, Stelio Gilles Robert, a former member of the Nation of Islam in Paris under the name Kemi Seba, was indicted in the past on charges of public slander and incitement to racial hatred. The day after the attack, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy wrote a letter to the minister of justice seeking an order to ban the group's Internet site, and the site was down two days later. The day after the incidents, Sarkozy received the president of CRIF and some area shopkeepers. The Socialist Party condemned the intimidations of the Tribu KA and called on authorities to get to the bottom of the events.

Sarkozy visited the area on May 31, 2006, proclaiming, "I don't want a single Jew to be afraid here. The fear of a single Jew is a stain on the French flag." Sarkozy announced that police were undertaking two investigations into the incident. He also noted he had asked legal experts to study how Tribu KA could be dissolved and reinforced patrols in the neighborhood.

Another interior ministry official stated during a June 4 interview that Sarkozy would seek to have the group sanctioned. However, a press report from mid-June suggested that investigators have were not able to find evidence (from videotapes and witnesses) that the gang members actually committed anti-Semitic acts or said anything that would be actionable under the law.

Also in June, the administrative tribunal of Toulouse convicted the French state and the state railways, the SNCF, for its role in the deportation of Jews during World War II. The specific case was brought by the family of Georges Liepitz, whom the state railway transferred in spring 1944 from Pau to the transit camp of Drancy, north of Paris. (The family was ultimately liberated.) In its judgment, the court declared that "The French administration could not manifestly ignore that their transfer...facilitated an operation that would normally have been the prelude to the deportation of the concerned persons." The SNCF, which was ordered to pay \$74,400 (62,000 euros) to the Lipietz family, said it will appeal the decision.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government has taken a number of proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each department and creating a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and sectarian assaults and other incidents. The number of racist and anti-Semitic incidents reported by the Government in 2005 was down 38 percent over those in 2004. In late 2003, the Ministry of Education created a national commission to combat anti-Semitism in schools, and the Government continued efforts to promote tolerance and combat racism and anti-Semitism throughout the reporting period. In August 2004, the Mayor of Paris sent letters to all Paris-area principals calling for "debates on anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination" when classes resumed in September.

Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-president of the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), received positive responses to his June 2005 tour of Jewish and Muslim leaders throughout the country to promote dialogue between the two communities. As a result, Rabbi Serfaty followed up with a tour of the Paris region in April and another country-wide tour in May.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a number of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report. The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives. It serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discusses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In 2004, the Government released the Rufin Report, which concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to French democracy and that anti-Semitic acts are not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and Muslim youth of North African descent, but also by "disaffected individuals" whose anti-Semitic obsessions prompt their attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions. The Rufin Report also warned against radical anti-Zionists who question Israel's right to exist. The report recommended that a law be created to punish those publicly equating Israel with apartheid or Nazi Germany. Additionally, the report concluded that the press law of 1881, designed to guarantee freedom of the press, was too unwieldy to adequately address the issues of racism and anti-Semitism. It recommended removing from the press law all injunctions against incitement to racism and anti-Semitism and putting them into a new law written specifically to address these issues. The Rufin Report also called for countering intolerance in primary schools; educating new immigrants about the fight against racism and anti-Semitism; and creating an observation system to monitor racist and anti-Semitic websites and to work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

In a March 2006 annual report to the prime minister, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) indicated that there were 974 racist and anti-Semitic incidents in 2005, a drop of 38 percent from the 1,574 recorded in 2004. The number of anti-Semitic incidents - including physical assaults, attacks against property, cemetery desecrations, threats, and reported insults - decreased 48 percent, from 974 in 2004 to 504 in 2005. The NCCHR also indicated that the decrease in anti-Semitic incidents extended into the schools, an area that has been of great concern in recent years. According to Ministry of Interior figures, the number of racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic incidents in schools dropped by 54 percent in 2005, with the number of anti-Semitic incidents seeing the greatest decrease. The Ministry of Education likewise reported a 30 percent reduction in incidents of intolerance.

The NCCHR report noted that the number of anti-Semitic threats and insults committed by those of "Arab-Muslim" background dropped from 429 in 2004 to 99 in 2005, a decrease of 77 percent, and comprised 24 percent of the total. The number of threats and insults committed by the extreme right remained relatively stable (148 in 2005 as opposed to 152 in 2004) and made up 36 percent of the incidents recorded. Authorities were unable to identify the perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence in 47 percent of the cases. Individuals of "Arab-Muslim" background were responsible for 41 percent of violent incidents while members of the extreme-right were culpable for 10 percent.

The NCCHR report stated, "despite the efforts deployed to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, there is still a long way to go." Specifically, the NCCHR noted a "lifting of the taboo" against racist attitudes, as evidenced by polls indicating that one in three citizens admits to being at least "a little" racist, up from 25 percent in the 2004 report. In its list of recommendations, the NCCHR encouraged the Government to continue efforts to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, particularly as they were disseminated on the Internet.

Judging that French society historically had "perhaps not been vigilant enough in the face of racism and anti-Semitism," Justice Minister Pascal Clement announced that French courts handed down 434 convictions for racist and anti-Semitic crimes in 2005, a 43 percent increase over the 303 convictions recorded in 2004. The rise in convictions, the minister noted, was not due to a rise in incidents, but rather to "better pursuit" of the acts that did occur. Additionally, prosecutors were under orders to seek maximum punishments in hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not considered strong enough.

CRIF operated a hotline to register allegations of threats in the greater Paris region. Additionally, CRIF contributed an analysis of anti-Semitic acts and threats in the NCCHR's 2005 annual report. Based on its own information and that of the Jewish Community Protection Service, CRIF registered 252 anti-Semitic incidents during the first ten months of 2005, as opposed to 484 during the same period of time in 2004. CRIF stated in the NCCHR report that its figures do not always correspond to those of the Government, as victims do not always report their attacks to both the police and CRIF. CRIF also noted its concern about the availability of anti-Semitic diffusions via the Internet, the radio, and satellite television.

Authorities met with international organizations to discuss efforts to fight anti-Semitism. Representatives of the American Jewish Committee made several trips during the reporting period to consult with officials and expressed support for government efforts. President Chirac declared his "absolute determination" to fight anti-Semitism in a May 2, 2006, meeting with members of the UJA-Federation of New York, who also discussed the issue with the ministers of justice and the interior.

In 2003, after an arson attack destroyed a Jewish school in Gagny, President Chirac stated "an attack on a Jew is an attack on France" and ordered the formation of an interministerial committee charged with leading an effort to combat anti-Semitism. Since its first meeting in 2003, the committee has worked to improve government coordination in the fight against anti-Semitism, including the timely publication of statistics and reinforced efforts to prosecute attackers.

Authorities condemned anti-Semitic attacks, maintained heightened security at Jewish institutions, investigated the attacks, made arrests, and pursued prosecutions. More than thirteen mobile units, totaling more than 1,200 police officers, were assigned to those locales with the largest Jewish communities. Fixed or mobile police were present in the schools, particularly during the hours when children were entering or leaving school buildings. All of these measures were coordinated closely with leaders of the Jewish communities in the country, notably CRIF.

The Government took other steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, particularly among young people; however, some groups asserted that the judicial system was lax in its sentencing of anti-Semitic offenders. Schools emphasized the need for tolerance, and copies of the film "Shoah" were distributed to all high schools for use in history and civics classes.

The Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each national department and announcing in June 2004 the creation of a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and anti-sectarian incidents. In September 2004, the mayor of Paris launched a campaign to fight all forms of intolerance that included 1,200 municipal billboards and bulletins in major newspapers.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism. However, the situation improved in 2005, during which, according to the NCCHR, there were 470 racist acts recorded, a decrease of 22 percent from the 600 committed in 2004. Of these, the drop was most profoundly noted in the number of violent incidents (88 in 2005 as opposed to 169 in 2004). More than half of the racist incidents (257) were attributed to far-right extremists. However, violent racist incidents on the island of Corsica, which made up 48 percent of the attacks in 2004, comprised only 27 percent of the incidents in 2005.

Attacks in Corsica were often blamed on elements of the island's nationalist movement, and many incidents involved graffiti with such slogans as "Arabs Out" and "Corsica for the Corsicans" written in the Corsican language. On January 18, 2006, a bomb exploded outside a Muslim-owned butcher shop in the Corsican capitol of Ajaccio, the fourth such attack against the same shop. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. In November 2004, assailants opened fire on an imam as he answered a knock at the door of the Muslim Cultural Association of Sartene, in southern Corsica. The imam was uninjured. In that same month, police placed fourteen members of the nationalist group Clandestini Corsi under investigation. In December 2004, there were two attacks against a building that houses immigrants. Also in that

month, Corsican authorities held a week of events aimed at increasing awareness of the danger of racism and promoting co-existence between immigrant and native Corsican populations. The attacks caused some families to move to the mainland or return to their countries of origin.

On November 11, 2005, a mosque near Lyon was attacked with little damage reported. On November 13 and 14, two firebomb attacks were attempted against the Grand Mosque of Lyon. On November 20, a mosque in the eastern town of Fougères was hit with two firebombs, but no one was injured, and the main prayer room was not damaged. Political and religious leaders condemned the attacks, and authorities actively investigated the incidents. Many suspected the attacks might have been committed by right-wing militants in response to the unrest occurring nightly at the time.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Muslim headscarves might have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discouraged women employees from wearing the headscarf or encouraged them to wear a bandanna in its place.

Authorities cracked down on efforts by small groups linked to the extreme right responsible for distributing "identity soup" made with pork, which is forbidden to those observing kosher or halal diets, to the homeless. Police shut down efforts to distribute the soup once it was determined to contain pork, and in January the city of Strasbourg banned the practice as a threat to public order. "Schemes with racial subtexts must be denounced," announced the mayor of Strasbourg.

In 2004, a court handed down a four-month suspended sentence and a \$13,624 (10,000 euros) fine to a woman who refused to sell property to an Arab couple.

Cemeteries and religious sites were often targets of attack; the Interior Ministry announced desecrations and destructive acts at ninety-two Christian, thirty-one Jewish, and twenty-eight Muslim sites in 2004. Many of these incidents occurred in Alsace, where extreme-right groups have ties to similar groups across the border in Germany. In January 2006, two individuals were arrested and charged with the April 29, 2004, desecration of 127 tombs in a Jewish cemetery in Herrlisheim, near the German border. An accomplice, a member of the extreme-right political party the National Front, was previously arrested in December 2004. Emmanuel Rist, one of the two arrested for the defamation, and another individual were also charged with a September 8, 2005, explosion that injured Benemar Lhabib, a sixty-five-year-old Moroccan. A letter following the bombing claimed responsibility and called for a "Nordic-Aryan" Alsace. In May 2005, approximately sixty gravestones were smashed and a swastika drawn on a door of a Jewish cemetery in Sarreguemines (eastern France) shortly after the memorial service for the town's Holocaust victims had been held. Two young vandals, aged fourteen and twelve, were caught and confessed to having committed the act "out of foolishness."

On May 18, 2006, the Government approved a ministry of interior decision to disband the neo-Nazi group Elsass Korps. The dissolution would prevent the group from meeting publicly and punish individuals found to be reconstituting the group under a different name.

In May 2005, a Versailles court of appeals found the authors and publisher of a 2002 article titled "Israel-Palestine: The Cancer" guilty of "racial defamation" for anti-Semitic content. Journalists Edgar Morin, Daniele Sallenave, and Sami Nair, as well as editor Jean-Marie Colombani were ordered to pay the legal fees of the prosecuting groups and \$1.20 (1 euro) each in damages. The publishing newspaper, *Le Monde*, was ordered to print a retraction. The decision was controversial, particularly as one of the authors, Edgar Morin, was Jewish. A judge dismissed the initial complaint, ruling that any reasonable reader would not equate criticism of then-Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and his supporters as an attack on all Jews, but an appeals court found that three sentences in the article violated a 1990 antiracism law.

In June 2005, a Paris court ordered French Internet service providers (ISPs) to block the website of the French revisionist organization Association of Former Connoisseurs of War and Holocaust Stories (AAARGH) to French viewers. Two of three U.S. ISPs agreed to stop hosting AAARGH's website.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

Representatives from the embassy met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom issues. These issues were raised regularly in meetings with other officials and members of Parliament. Embassy officers also met regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. The embassy maintained regular contact with the representative bodies that comprise the French Council of the Muslim Faith and visits mosques run by the various organizations as part of its promotion of religious freedom and Muslim outreach efforts. In December 2005, the embassy and the Paris-based representative of the American Jewish Committee organized a meeting between the ambassador and leading Jewish intellectuals and educators to examine the relationship between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in France. In May, the ambassador co-hosted with the ambassadors of Great Britain, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia a screening of the film "The Power of Good," which detailed the efforts of Sir Nicolas Winton to save 669 children from Nazi extermination during World War II, as part of the embassy's efforts to promote religious tolerance. The embassy facilitated the visits of American Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members and representatives from other government agencies, to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior government officials.

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