



France

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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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, anti-Semitic attacks increased during 2006, with a marked increase in violent acts. 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. Some groups also expressed concern with a government report focusing on dangers that cults pose to minors.

Anti-Semitic acts increased by 6 percent in 2006, and violent incidents rose more sharply, from 99 in 2005 to 134 in 2006, according to the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (NCCHR). There were 42 violent acts directed against the North African community in 2006, down from 64 in 2005. Of these incidents, 11 were explicitly anti-Islamic in nature, targeting mosques, cemeteries, or individuals. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to strongly criticize 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. On May 13-16, 2007, the Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism visited and met with government officials and representatives from various religious communities as part of an ongoing effort to assess and to support international efforts against anti-Semitism.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles and a population of 63.71 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to a January 2007 poll, 51 percent of respondents indicate they are Catholic, even if they never attend religious services. Another 31 percent of those polled state that they have no religious affiliation. Among Catholics, only 8 percent attend Mass weekly, one third do so "occasionally," and 46 percent attend "only for baptisms, weddings, and funerals." Only 52 percent of declared Catholics believe that the existence of God is "certain or possible." There are 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 are practicing vary widely. According to a 2004 survey, 36 percent of Muslims identify themselves as regularly observing traditional rites and practices. However, according to press reports of a September 2006 poll, 88 percent of Muslim respondents report that they were observing the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a marked increase over previously recorded levels of observance. According to press reports, there are more than 2,000 mosques in the country. Protestants make up 3 percent of the population, the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent.

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

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

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

Other religions present in the country include Evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing (with as many as 400,000 adherents, according to February 2007 press reports), including African-style "prosperity" churches especially in the suburbs of Paris, in large part because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology has 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 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 10 national holidays, 5 are Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register but may apply for tax-exempt status or gain official recognition if they so wish. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations culturelles (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. There is a process by which groups may appeal the initial decision of a prefecture. To qualify, the group's sole purpose must be 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 100 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 50 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.

On October 17, 2006, the head of the Interior Ministry's Office for Religious Affairs, Didier Leschi, testified before Parliament about the use of tax advantages to combat "sectarian deviance," which he specified as violent and suicidal acts; inhumane treatment of children and adolescents, particularly victimization of young women by confinement; denial of schooling; forced marriage; and refusal to allow sexes to mix in schools or hospitals. He stated that the main legal measure by which his office combats such deviance is through its power to regulate worship associations benefiting from tax advantages. This right to designate tax status applies to taxes on residence, land, and equipment, as well as exoneration from transfer taxes on gifts, legacies, bequeathals, and offerings; additionally, the discretion in designating tax status entails the right to issue receipts, allowing donors tax deductions. According to Leschi's testimony, this right to assign tax status "is useful as an instrument that may be used to control possible sectarian deviances of a group--and that at any moment; for if an organization no longer meets the necessary conditions, in particular with regard to public order, we may ask the prefect to repeal his authorization."

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. In 2002 the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it to no avail. Although the provisions allowing for the

dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time in 2004 against the leader of a cult.

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 90 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 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but facts about religions are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may homeschool 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 affiliated with religious organizations.

In 2004 the Government released the Rufin Report, which concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to democracy and that anti-Semitic acts were not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and Muslim youth of North African descent, but also by "disaffected individuals" with anti-Semitic obsessions. 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.

On June 20, 2007, President Sarkozy's newly named Interior Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, received representatives of France's major religious confessions - Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish - to hear their perspectives on the public policy of public sphere secularism and to elicit their thoughts on the role of religion in community life, particularly with regard to young people. Part of the impetus for the meeting was the September 20, 2006, announcement, by then-Minister of the Interior Sarkozy, of a plan to discuss the findings of a report from the Commission of Judicial Consideration on the Relation of Religions and Public Authority. Sarkozy stated that he wished to facilitate "a debate without taboos" about the merits of legal reform concerning religion.

The Commission, established in 2005 by Sarkozy and led by law professor Jean-Pierre Machelon, recommended reforming the 1905 law separating church and state to allow local communities to finance the construction of places of worship. The Machelon Report also proposed implementing a less rigid set of criteria necessary for a religion to have the legal status of an *association cultuelle*. The proposed reform would allow for *association cultuelle* to integrate activities such as social events and book selling, thereby "enlarging the social presence" of religions. The report proposals support Sarkozy's assertion in 2002 that the French state should encourage a public form of Islam, moderated by social recognition and open practice: "What we should be afraid of is Islam gone astray... 'garage Islam'... 'basement Islam'... 'underground Islam.' It is not the Islam of the mosques, open to the light of day."

On January 8, 2007, an administrative court in Paris ruled that a nationalist group, Solidarity of the French, could no longer hand out "pig soup," made with bacon and pig parts, to the homeless. Many saw the group as inciting racial hatred by deliberately excluding those who follow a halal or kosher diet.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict antidefamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Gayssot Act (Loi Gayssot, 1990) makes it a

crime to question the existence of the category of crimes against humanity as defined by the London Charter of 1945. 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 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, and in 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 16 churches and 60 associations, and serves as the interlocutor with the Government. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes Jewish associations culturelles 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 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 Council of the Muslim Faith and 25 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 2004 then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of the Foundation for 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 country's language, history, and civics; however, it suffers from a lack of foreign or private funding. Funding mosques has also proven to be politically divisive. On April 17, 2007, a Marseille administrative council, at the behest of group of legislators, annulled a June 26, 2006, municipal council decision to facilitate building the Grande Mosque of Marseille. Tribunal members judged that the rescinded authorization, which would have provided a large tract of land for a nominal fee on a 99-year lease, constituted a state subsidy that contravened the 1905 law separating church and state. A new, fair market rate price is scheduled to be negotiated later in 2007.

In 2004 Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons." On September 7, 2006, authorities deported to Algiers Chelali Benchellali, a controversial imam who made public statements in support of terrorism at his mosque in the suburbs of Lyon. According to the Interior Ministry, 17 Islamic activists were expelled in 2006, including at least 4 imams for promoting "propaganda in favor of radical Islam and inciting hate or violence." French law permits the revocation of acquired citizenship and expulsion of individuals determined to have incited hate or violence. Although authorities based their actions on security grounds in some cases, some Muslims described the deportation of a number of radical Islamist religious figures since 2004 as a restriction on religious freedom.

The 2006 NCCHR announced that, as of January 2007, the Ministry of Justice would replace the statistical category of "Anti-Religious Acts" with the more precise categories of "Anti-Semitic Acts," "Anti-Islamic Acts" and "Other, including Anti-Christian Acts."

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. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, visited the country in 2005 and issued a report on her findings on March 8, 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; particularly the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, which may "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf or other religious symbols" but also may serve to deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious belief." She continued: "the stigmatization of the headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In 2004 the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law banning religious symbols in school did not violate the freedom of religion. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. Minority religious groups cite a growing body of

precedent-setting case law from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which enforces the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and is binding on all Council of Europe members, to contest unequal treatment under law. Critics of the Government's distinction between religions and "cults" (sectes) note that, in support of a policy of "true religious pluralism," the ECHR has instructed governments to remain neutral and impartial, finding that the "the right to freedom of religion as guaranteed under the Constitution excludes any discretion on the part of the state to determine whether religious beliefs or the means used to express such beliefs are legitimate."

Following the enactment of the law, media reports indicated that a number of Muslim girls and Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violations; all had subsequently reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group indicated that the law adversely affected many more Muslim girls than boys, whether by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimated that, of the country's 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wore headscarves. The Sikh community reported that, of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 168 (some 84 percent) were affected by the legislation.

During the year authorities registered four legal cases involving infractions of the 2004 law. When school resumed in September 2006 after the summer vacation, schools in Seine Saint Denis denied admission to three Sikh students who refused to remove their turbans; two were subsequently accepted into private schools, and the third was awaiting an appearance before a disciplinary council at year's end. On November 21, 2006, a 16 year old Sikh appealed his expulsion for refusal to take off his turban. The Association of United Sikhs supported his appeal. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of Muslim girls being denied admission at the beginning of the autumn term.

According to a March 28, 2007, statement by the director of United Sikhs Legal Team for the Right to Turban Campaign, in 2006 the United Sikhs filed a complaint with the European Court of Justice on behalf of all Sikhs whose turban cases were outstanding. In addition, at the end of the reporting period there were two cases awaiting appeal in the courts, one involving the petition of a group of Sikh schoolboys to wear their turbans in school, the other involving the demand of two Sikhs to wear their turbans for their official identification document photographs.

A respected Muslim observer complained that police sometimes singled out young Muslim men and demanded their documents, a tactic he described as a form of harassment intended to keep them out of certain neighborhoods.

On November 8, 2006, two of the 72 Muslim airport workers at the Paris airport Charles de Gaulle, whom the Government had stripped of their security clearances, won back their badges after taking legal action. The others, including six colleagues who had also been part of the legal action lodged against Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, remain barred from restricted areas at the airport. Although unions at the state-owned facility met on November 7, 2006 to consider a strike to protest the government's actions, which they claimed discriminated against Muslim employees, the officials were unable to reach agreement. There were also press reports that six workers were fired from Roissy Airport. Press reports indicated that lawyers for several of the men stated that investigators asked their clients how frequently they prayed during the day, if they had been to Mecca, and if they knew any imams. Authorities countered that thousands of Muslim workers had received credentials authorizing them to work in the secure area of the airport. Court cases are ongoing. In addition, according to July 24, 2006, press reports, the Minister of the Interior announced the closure of five unofficial Muslim "prayer rooms" at Charles de Gaulle airport.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers "cults" but is actively debating the basis on which religions are accorded the status of association culturelle. On October 17, 2006, a heated parliamentary debate took place between Office of Religious Affairs Director Leschi and several deputies concerning the question and the status of the Jehovah's Witnesses. According to Mr. Leschi, "the administrative judge is very clear, the Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to profit from the [tax] advantages pertaining to worship associations." Leschi's statement elicited lively opposition, notably from deputy George Fenech who cited reports of child abuse among members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2005 then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a circular indicating the authorities should focus their investigative efforts and attention on "small, fluid" groups that are "less easily identifiable," that use the Internet for recruitment, as opposed to the Parliament identifying sects. Some religious groups hailed the move as a step forward but asked the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to issue a circular rescinding repressive measures against minority religions. To date, the MOJ has issued no such circular.

In 1996 a parliamentary commission studying "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.

On May 5, 2007, a German court ruled that European countries should drop their Schengen entry prohibitions against Unification Church leaders the Reverend and Mrs. Moon, who are listed as "dangerous persons" under the European

Schengen Information System and consequently are forbidden entry into the 12 Schengen Convention states. Reverend and Mrs. Moon have also brought a court action in France to overturn their designation, arguing that a reading of the Schengen Convention reveals that its security provisions are designed to keep out drug dealers, arms smugglers, terrorists, and other dangerous criminals, not leaders of religious groups--even controversial religious groups. Moreover, Moon's advocates have argued that all members of the Schengen System are also obligated by their membership in the United Nations and as signatories to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

On December 19, 2006, the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Influence of Sects on Minors, presented its report entitled "Stolen Childhood--Minors Victimized by Cults." The National Assembly created the commission on June 28, 2006, to investigate the "insidious means" by which sects seek to proselytize youths and the negative impact sects can have on youths' physical and psychological well-being. The report found that children were increasingly easy targets for manipulation and exploitation by sectarian groups and that public sector action was key to preventing abuse. The Commission did not produce a list of suspect groups but defined the characteristics causing concern, including the practice of psychological destabilization, excessive financial demands on members, and the indoctrination of children. The report cited a senior official's assertion that "a minimum of 60,000 to 80,000 children" are being raised in a sectarian context, of which "about 45,000 are affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses," and that public authorities, notably the Ministry of Interior, had been "negligent" in their supervision of the danger.

The report concluded with 50 recommendations aimed at establishing better protection for children involved with sectarian religious groups. Recommended actions included enhancing oversight of homeschooling, mandating regular health check-ups for minors, providing access to legal counsel if needed, instituting safeguards against excessive confinement, creating a post dedicated to monitoring problems related to sectarian abuses, and strengthening MIVILUDES activities at an international level. Specifically, the report recommended working through the Council of Europe to create a European observatory of religious groups dedicated to facilitating intellectual exchanges among member countries to share experience and insight on how these groups are treated by member state governments.

Certain sectarian groups protested the report, including the Church of Scientology, which rejects its characterization as a cult, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, which asserted that on the day that the Third Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Sects was created, only 10 out of 577 members of parliament were present at the National Assembly. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses also alleged that during the reporting period the rapporteur and the secretary of the newly convened commission openly attacked them, describing them as delinquents and criminals and labeling their activities as "mafia like." The commission's report also elicited criticism from other minority religious and civil rights groups, which labeled the commission's conclusions an affront to freedom of conscience and religious belief.

On January 24, 2007, MIVILUDES published its report for 2006, focusing on new fund-raising and recruitment strategies employed by groups it considers "cults." The report elaborated on the phenomenon of targeting for recruitment marginalized youth from inner-city and poor suburbs, again mentioning specifically the Church of Scientology's efforts to attract adherents from these environments. The 2006 report elaborated on proselytizing tactics and their psychological consequences, the increasing use of hallucinogenic drugs by members of certain cults, the effects of cult membership on extended families, and cults' efforts to develop private sector commercial interests, including legal, media, and governmental lobbying efforts. The MIVILUDES report concluded that certain judicial authorities remained reticent to recognize the "mental subjugation" suffered by many members of cults and recommended more elaborate means of information exchange among authorities, particularly in cases involving children's well-being.

Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report were unsubstantiated and often false, adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved.

According to an April 19, 2007, press report, a Paris appeals court recently reversed a September 2006 judgment throwing out a 2002 complaint filed by a Belgian citizen against the Church of Scientology for fraud, extortion, and illegal use of drugs. Court lawyers argued that the 2006 judgment failed to investigate all the implicated parties and ignored psychiatric testimony according to which the plaintiff had been under "the permanent influence [of and] pressure from harassment" from Scientologists who were accused of having used "violent means" to intimidate and extort money.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. On April 16, 2007, an administrative court in Nantes ruled in favor of SEL, a Church of Scientology organization, and against the mayor of Angers who had banned SEL from locally selling Dianetics and other books by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. The court rejected the mayor's claim that the sales prohibition was necessary to maintain public order and ordered the city of Angers to pay SEL \$1,600 (€1,200) in damages.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, whose 2002 court ruling to pay back taxes, now currently totaling \$54,400,000 (€40,908,000), is on appeal before the ECHR, which is expected to render a judgment in the summer of 2007. On December 21, 2006, La Croix reported that there was a good chance that the Government would lose its court case

against the Jehovah's Witnesses and would be obligated to return \$6,750,000 (€5,000,000) in property it had already confiscated from the group. Perhaps prompting this belief that the Government would lose the case, an article published on November 1, 2006, in *Le Canard Enchaîné* reported that the Government had contacted the ECHR to relate its interest in negotiating an extra-judicial settlement with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

On October 12, 2006, the Government responded to the ECHR's May 4, 2006, notification of the Jehovah's Witnesses' 2005 application to the court. The Government provided its written observations on the admissibility and merits of the claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses based on the religious freedom and discrimination conventions of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Jehovah's Witnesses members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult and their placement on a 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Vosges Department reported difficulty gaining permission to build a house of worship in the town of Deyvilliers, where an opposition group has lobbied since 2004 against the construction of a 1,500-seat Kingdom Hall by the Jehovah's Witnesses. On May 10, 2007, the Agence France-Presse reported that a local court ruled the Jehovah's Witnesses' complaint against the opposition group inadmissible.

On March 30, 2007, a Lyon appeals court upheld the March 15, 2007, Lyon court decision that the city, after refusing to rent communal meeting space to the Jehovah's Witnesses for a yearly gathering of 4,500 adherents, was compelled to rent the group a conference forum.

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

The NCCHR, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported in March 2007 that 2006 witnessed a slight increase in anti-Semitic acts--541 events, a 6 percent increase from the 508 reported events in 2005. A larger proportion of 2006 anti-Semitic acts were violent--134 as opposed to 99 in 2005. Recorded incidents returned to lower levels during the final months of 2006, a trend that continued into early 2007. Despite this overall increase in anti-Semitic acts in 2006, the NCCHR also reported that anti-Semitic acts committed by students during the 2005-2006 academic year dropped by 40 percent.

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 to the NCCHR's 2006 annual report. In a parallel study, the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community announced on February 26, 2007, that 2006 witnessed larger increases in reported anti-Semitic activity, with 213 anti-Semitic acts (up 40 percent from 134 in 2005) and 158 anti-Semitic threats or insults (up 7 percent from 148 in 2005) for a total of 371 episodes (up 24 percent from 2005). These statistics indicate a net increase in anti-Semitic episodes for the months following the killing of Ilan Halimi on February 13, 2006, and the Israel-Hezbollah fighting during the summer. CRIF said in a subsequent communiqué that "the essential and most worrying aspect [of the report is a] 45 percent increase in physical attacks" on people. CRIF stated in an earlier 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, radio, and satellite television.

The NCCHR report noted that the number of anti-Semitic threats and insults committed by those of "Arab-Muslim" background increased from 99 in 2005 to 115 in 2006, an increase of 16 percent. The number of threats and insults committed by the extreme right dropped (98 in 2006 as opposed to 150 in 2005) and made up 24 percent of the incidents recorded. Authorities were unable to identify the perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence in 61 percent of the cases. Individuals of "Arab-Muslim" background were responsible for 28 percent of violent incidents, while members of the extreme right were culpable for 10 percent.

The NCCHR report stated that "despite a significant response on the part of government authorities," there is still much work that remains, particularly in creating a comprehensive strategy that includes judicial, educational, and public relations

elements to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. The NCCHR report went on to emphasize the importance of government cooperation with civil society and the role of preventative action led by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing. The commission also noted certain government omissions during 2006, specifically a failure to reconvene the Interministerial Committee for the Battle against Racism and Anti-Semitism since January 2005 and the absence of a national action plan in conformity with the final declaration of the World Conference of the United Nations against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Intolerance.

Despite the increase in recorded anti-Semitic acts in 2006, the NCCHR cites MOJ statistics that during 2006 there were 128 court cases involving religious discrimination (up 4 percent from 123 in 2005) and 458 court cases involving anti-Semitism (down 3 percent from 473 in 2005). (The MOJ makes a distinction between anti-Semitic acts and religious discrimination, which includes all other crimes with religious motivations, thus accounting for differences in statistics on overall religious discrimination.) Fifty-nine percent of the religious discrimination cases and 38 percent of the anti-Semitism cases led to judicial proceedings.

Prosecutors were under orders to seek maximum punishments in hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not considered strong enough.

On April 30, 2007, state prosecutors opened an official investigation for armed robbery and violence by a group with racist motives after an April 26, 2007, attack on a 22-year-old Jewish student in a Marseille metro parking area. According to the victim, two men physically assaulted her, including slashing her t-shirt with a knife and inscribing a swastika on her torso with a felt-tipped pen before fleeing with her purse and cell phone.

On April 21, 2007, vandals damaged 180 graves, a quarter of which were Jewish, in the main Le Havre cemetery of Saint-Marie.

On April 19, 2007, Lille Rabbi Elie Dahan, who presided over a well-attended commemoration ceremony following the desecration of 51 Jewish tombs in Lille, and who had been an active spokesman for the Jewish community during the subsequent police investigation, was verbally and physically assaulted in Paris. On March 31, 2007, desecration of the tombs prompted widespread condemnation and a large-scale police investigation into what one government official called "the largest event of this sort ever to happen in the region." The vandalism elicited a solidarity march in the cemetery attended by a thousand people.

In late March 2007, a Nice-area daily published an article detailing the continued existence of Vichy-era legal prohibitions on renting or selling property to Jews. According to the former Nice-Côte d'Azur CRIF president, it was regrettable that the discriminatory co-ownership settlements were still found in older contractual agreements because of the painful memories that they evoked; however, she explained that the measures themselves became null and void immediately after World War II and have not been applied to discriminate against Jewish property owners since that time.

On March 27, 2007, a Bordeaux Appeals Court overturned the June 2006 Toulouse administrative tribunal conviction of the state and the state railways, the SNCF, for their 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 from Pau to the transit camp of Drancy, north of Paris. (The family was ultimately liberated.) The SNCF, which was ordered to pay \$82,700 (€62,000) to the Lipietz family, successfully appealed the decision in which presiding judges emphasized that the SNCF was compelled to render its transportation services. According to the court, the SNCF acted as "a private entity" requisitioned by the German-controlled Vichy government, and the case therefore did not fall within the jurisdiction of an administrative court empowered to adjudicate disputes between citizens and the government. Lipietz announced his intention to appeal the judgment before the State Council, the highest administrative court, on the grounds that the SNCF is a public entity that the administrative courts should be qualified to judge. In the wake of the overturned June 2006 decision against the SNCF, 200 other families filed similar compensation claims.

On March 20, 2007, the Global News Service for the Jewish People reported that more than 7,000 individuals (not all were Jewish and not all were from France) signed a petition asking for political asylum in the United States because of the dangers they faced from anti-Semitism in the country. News of the petition was met with outrage by most Jewish community spokespersons in the country. "This petition is bizarre, stupid, and out of place," said the CRIF director in a subsequent interview with Israel's Ma'ariv newspaper. "I don't feel threatened . . . , and the authorities are doing everything they can to protect the Jewish community. Jews don't need this kind of petition."

On March 1, 2007, in a radio interview, former prime minister Raymond Barre appeared to justify the collaboration of Vichy-era government officials with the Nazi occupiers' deportation of Jews and defended right-wing extremist Bruno Gollnisch's right to voice opinions that falsify the magnitude of Nazi killing of Jews. An anti-racist NGO, SOS Racism, demanded that legal action be taken against Barre, but no reports were available to suggest that any such action had been initiated.

On February 8, 2007, in Chartres, Stello Gilles Robert, a former member of the Nation of Islam in Paris under the name Kemi Semba and the leader of Tribu KA, a 30-member group of extremist blacks known to police for their racist rhetoric against Jews and whites, was charged with inciting racial hatred and anti-Semitic comments after yelling epithets at authorities. The Government has repeatedly closed down the organization's websites, only to have them appear again. During his May 3, 2007, court testimony, Semba affirmed his comments, contending that he had only cast aspersions on Zionism and had not made anti-Semitic statements. Plaintiffs have petitioned the court to impose a sentence of six months, a fine of \$13,300 (€10,000), and the deprivation of Semba's civic rights for five years, a stipulation that would prevent Semba from acting on his stated intention of running for office in the next municipal elections. The court announced plans to render its judgment on June 28, 2007, but had not done so by the end of the reporting period.

On January 18, 2007, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, member of the European Parliament, and vice-president of the extreme-right National Front, was sentenced to a three-month suspended jail sentence and fined \$6,500 (€5,000) for several comments made to the media in 2004 regarding the Holocaust. He questioned the use of gas chambers and stated, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate it." The judge also ordered Gollnisch to pay \$73,300 (€55,000) in damages to the plaintiffs and to pay for the judgment to be published in the newspapers that originally printed his remarks. His 2005 expulsion from the university where he was teaching and five-year banishment from teaching were confirmed on May 22, 2006.

On November 23, 2006, a policeman fatally shot one person and gravely injured another while protecting an Israeli fan from an enraged mob following a soccer team's defeat by Hapoel Tel Aviv. A group of 150 incensed fans confronted the departing Israeli team supporter with threats and anti-Semitic epithets.

On November 9, 2006, arsonists set fire to a Jewish school in Gagny, north of Paris. The fire caused little damage, in contrast to an arson attack on the same school in 2003 that destroyed 32,000 square feet of the school. Police opened an investigation. Days afterward, then-president Chirac announced a tougher policy to combat anti-Semitism.

Following the February 13, 2006, kidnapping and killing of a young Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, several anti-Semitic incidents were reported, many in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles. Previously unreported incidents include the following: On March 12, 2006, vandals broke into a synagogue in Sarcelles and threw religious objects to the ground; on March 6, 2006, in Lyon, a Jewish pupil was attacked and kicked in the face by four youths, subsequently in custody for violence and injury "with anti-Semitic character."

On October 23, 2006, the local police tribunal of Colmar fined the main suspect in the 2004 cemetery desecration of 127 graves in the Jewish cemetery in Herrlisheim \$930 (700 €), plus one euro damages, for sending anti-Semitic letters to the Haut-Rhin consistory of Jews and two others in the Jewish community.

On July 12, 2006, a higher court overruled the 2005 Versailles Court of Appeals verdict against the authors and publisher of a 2002 article for "racial defamation" due to the article's alleged anti-Semitic content which violated a 1990 anti racism law. The higher court annulled the racial defamation judgment, stating that the published text was the expression of an opinion in an ideological debate.

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. Many schools feature commemorative plaques detailing Nazi deportation of children during the war.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Senior government officials, up to and including former president Chirac and President Sarkozy, have strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism, and in particular on March 11, 2007, at the annual CRIF dinner where the guest list included the country's most influential politicians and public servants. Throughout his term as Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy took an active public role in denouncing and combating anti-Semitism wherever he encountered it, including personally overseeing the dismantlement last year of the website operated by the anti-Semitic group, Tribu KA. Moreover, in the first five months of 2007, according to the Jewish Consistory, there was almost a 30 percent drop in anti-Semitic incidents from the same period in 2006 (112 incidents versus 158).

On March 22, 2007, a court ruled in favor of satirical weekly, Charlie Hebdo, which had published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, rejecting accusations by Islamic groups who accused the paper of inciting racial hatred. The court sided with arguments advanced by the public prosecutor that freedom of expression laws covered the paper's actions and that the cartoons were a critique of fundamentalism rather than Islam in general. The cartoons, originally published in 2005 by a Danish daily, provoked violent protests in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East; several European newspapers reprinted them

as affirmation of free speech.

On March 21, 2007, the Lyon school board head who opposed the opening of the country's second Muslim school lost his position after losing a contentious struggle over the opening of the "al-Kindi" Islamic Association's Muslim high school on February 28, 2007. The official had vigorously opposed the new high school, citing safety and environmental concerns and on October 4, 2006, had denied the school's original application. The denial was followed by demonstrations and sit-ins by Muslim organizations and their supporters.

On February 12, 2007, Alpes Maritimes Department President Christian Estrosi launched "Alpes Maritimes Fraternité," an "informal" structure designed to promote interreligious dialogue, harmony, and respect. The group will receive free office space from the Conseil General. Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant representatives attended the launch ceremony. The new group plans to hold periodic meetings, issue statements based exclusively on consensus, and engage in limited activities, such as issuing an ecumenical calendar and sponsoring historical colloquia.

Public schools made an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

On February 20, 2006, following the February 2006 killing of Ilam Halimi, then-prime minister de Villepin highlighted current and planned government efforts to combat anti-Semitism and other religiously motivated crimes in an address to CRIF representatives. These plans would take place over the next two years, and if carried out, would represent a good-faith effort to promote religious and ethnic tolerance.

On December 8, 2006, according to a Paris LCI Television report, a court sentenced arsonists to jail for up to five years for destroying the Annecy mosque and a prayer hall in 2004. The mosque representative accepted the arsonists' apologies and forgave them. It was reported that the prison terms were accompanied by suspended sentences and probationary periods for each of those sentenced.

According to a May 13, 2007, conversation with Embassy officials, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-President of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), continued his efforts to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts. Rabbi Serfaty's efforts include sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for French Muslim students.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and to maintain open lines of communication among different faith communities. The Council of Christian Churches in France, composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives, 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 addresses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

Please see the Anti-Semitism section above for reports of anti-Semitic incidents. Throughout 2007 there have been weekly reports in the press of cemetery desecrations of all religious groups. On May 24, 2007, a court convicted the author of racially motivated attacks and cemetery profanation; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He had attempted to kill two citizens of North African origin and had profaned 62 Jewish tombs in a Lyon cemetery in 2004.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism. However, the situation improved in 2006, during which, according to the NCCHR, there were 344 racist (often including anti-Islamic) acts recorded, a decrease from the 471 committed in 2005. The trend was also reflected in a drop in the number of violent incidents (64 in 2006 as opposed to 88 in 2005). Far-right extremists were responsible for 26 of the 42 violent racist incidents aimed at individuals of North African origin. The Government recorded 192 threats made against individuals of North African origin, of which 65 were explicitly anti-Islamic (up from 56 such threats in 2005). Violent racist incidents on the island of Corsica, which made up 27 percent of the attacks in 2005, comprised only 5 percent of the incidents in 2006.

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

On May 10, 2007, a court sentenced two individuals to two years in prison (with eligibility for parole after one year) for profaning 51 Muslim graves and the ossuary in the country's largest military cemetery, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, on April 19, 2007.

On October 23, 2006, vandals profaned the future Mosque of Belfort by leaving a pig's head in a window. Muslim worshippers also discovered posters of the National Front on the door of their temporary prayer room. The construction of the mosque, which was scheduled to open in 2007, was a source of controversy.

On January 8, 2007, an administrative court in Paris ruled that a nationalist group, Solidarity of the French, could no longer continue to hand out "pig soup," made with bacon and pig parts, to the homeless. On January 3, 2007, an earlier ruling had permitted the provision of the soup to continue. The mayor of Paris had condemned this ruling. Many saw the soup as a blatant act of racism, as it forbidden for those in the Islamic and Jewish communities to eat pork. Paris police shut down the operation a month earlier.

Plans to open the country's fifth private Muslim school in the fall of 2007 in a Paris suburb caused controversy among local political leaders. Muslim community spokespeople predicted a profusion of private confessional schools in France following the 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, but almost five years later this movement has not taken place. As of early 2007, the Ministry of Education recognized four private confessional schools nationwide.

According to September 29, 2006, press reports, a public high school teacher and writer from Saint-Orens-de-Gameville (near Toulouse), who attacked the Prophet Muhammad and Islam in a newspaper commentary, was forced to go into hiding under police protection after receiving a series of death threats, including one diffused on a radical Islamist online forum. Then-prime minister de Villepin called the threats "unacceptable," adding: "We are in a democracy. Everyone has the right to express his views freely, while respecting others, of course." An official investigation was opened.

On September 24, 2006, in the opening days of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, arsonists set fire to a mosque in Quimper after first painting six crosses on the building. On the same day, a mosque in Carcassonne was covered by 50 crosses and slogans, including some colloquial slurs for Arabs. The anti-racist group, Mrap, declared that the far right has contributed "to create a climate" that can lead to such acts by focusing on "the theme of the Islamization" of the country.

Racism and religious intolerance in Corsica remained a concern. On October 17, 2006, the penal court for minors of Paris gave 12 members of the armed group Clandestini Corsi jail sentences of 6 months to 7 years for 7 attacks against the Muslim community between March and September 2004. The court cited racism as an aggravating factor.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 21, 2006, the mayor of a city in Midi-Pyrénées received a letter declaring the manager of a tourist information office as a member of "one of the most dangerous sects" in the country because he is a Jehovah's Witness.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 20, 2006, a teacher in a school in Provence ordered students who were Jehovah's Witnesses to leave the classroom.

On December 18, 2006, representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization asserted that 78 of their places of worship had been vandalized since the beginning of the year. On October 20, 2006, a place of worship was burned to the ground in Villefranche sur Saone. The Jehovah's Witnesses attributed these and earlier attacks in part to a 1996 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry Report that described them as a "dangerous sect." On July 3, 2006, this designation was found to be a vague and superficial assessment by the Council of State.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination during the year. Scientologists continued to follow closely the growing body of precedent setting case law from the ECHR in order to contest what they regarded as unequal treatment.

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. Embassy officials met with and discussed religious freedom with senior representatives from the major faith traditions as well as representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church. Embassy officials hosted visits from Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the CRIF, the Central Consistory of Jews of France, the European Jewish Congress, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center.

On April 10, 2007, the Ambassador, accompanied by invited alumni of a 2003 State Department "International Visitor Leadership Program" called on Paris's Central Jewish Consistory on the occasion of its 200th anniversary and then visited a photo exhibit of Jewish children deported during WWII. The ambassador's visit was a public demonstration of the U.S. Government's support for interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance--the theme of the 2003 group project.

The Embassy facilitated the visit of the Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism and representatives from other government agencies to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior government officials.

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