



France

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the discriminatory treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists remains a concern. Some religious groups remain concerned about legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provides for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and bans 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.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice with the exception of its treatment of some minority religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. A law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students entered into force in 2004 and continued to be implemented during the reporting period. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-Ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES). Discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and other groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained a concern and may have contributed to acts of vandalism against these groups. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice: however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Anti-Semitic acts decreased by 33 percent in 2007, and violent incidents dropped 22 percent in 2007, according to the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH). There were 42 violent acts (same as in 2006) and 156 threats (down from 195 in 2006) directed against individuals of North African origin in 2007. Among the violent incidents, 14 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 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 63.7 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. In a January 2007 poll, 51 percent of respondents indicated they were Roman Catholic, including those who never *attend religious services*. *Of Catholics, only 10 percent went to church regularly--mainly to Sunday mass or christenings. There are an estimated 5 million to 6 million Muslims (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these are practicing vary widely. According to a January 17, 2008 survey in the Catholic daily La Croix, 39 percent of Muslims surveyed said they observed Islam's five prayers daily, an increase from 31 percent in 1994. Mosque attendance for Friday prayers rose to 23 percent, up from 16 percent in 1994, while Ramadan observance reached 70 percent compared to 60 percent in 1994. Drinking alcohol, which Islam forbids, also declined to 34 percent from 39 percent in 1994.*

Protestants make up 3 percent of the population, Jewish and Buddhist religious groups 1 percent each, and

Sikhs less than 1 percent.

In April 2008 a practicing Buddhist claimed the current estimate of 600,000 Buddhists strongly under represents the actual number of adherents; however, he acknowledged the difficulty in distinguishing between practicing Buddhists and the much larger number of persons who characterize themselves as sympathetic to certain Buddhist principles. Scholars distinguish between "sympathizers" (approximately 5 million), "associates" (defined as having a certain degree of proximity to Buddhism and estimated to number between 100,000 and 150,000), and "practitioners" (approximately 12,000). The biggest Buddhist meditation center in the West is in the region of Touraine, and two Tibetan monasteries in the Auvergne region have trained the largest number of Buddhist monks outside Asia, according to 2002 statistical data.

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 Churches.

Other religious groups 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 other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. 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 ten national holidays, five are Christian holy days: Easter, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

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 cultuelles (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and associations culturelles (cultural associations, which are normally not exempt). Associations in either category 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. There is a process to appeal the initial decision of a prefecture. To qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice 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 Islamic associations have tax-exempt 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-exempt 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. 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 the Neo Phare (New Lighthouse) group, Arnaud Mussy, whose announcement of the approaching apocalypse prompted a group member to commit suicide.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Protestant Reformed, and Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these groups. Adherents of these 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 mosque, the Paris Grand Mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain 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 Islamic 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. For the first time in the country, public school cafeterias in Lyon will replace beef with fish and eggs in order to satisfy the dietary requirements of certain religious confessions. The change is scheduled to take effect at the beginning of the 2008 academic year and will affect 16,400 students. Lyon public officials, who characterized the decision as "an effort at consensus building aimed at respecting diversity," took the decision after lengthy consultation with representatives of the major religious groups as well as pro-secularism groups. 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. 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.

Since taking office in May 2007, President Sarkozy has persistently pursued reform of the official policy of secularism, arguing for a wider public role for religion in society. He addressed religion in five major speeches—at the Vatican on December 20, 2007; in Riyadh on January 14, 2008; in Paris on January 17, 2008, to representatives of institutionalized religion; on January 18, 2008, to representatives of the diplomatic corps; and on February 13, 2008, at an event sponsored by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF).

On February 13, 2008, Sarkozy became the first sitting president since Francois Mitterrand to address the annual dinner of the CRIF. He used the occasion to respond to critics who perceived in his public comments a lack of commitment to the country's policy of official secularism. He said that religious morality and secular morality were complementary, and that the tragedies of the 20th century came from the absence of religion. He lashed out at a slavish adherence to a rigid secularism that prevented interaction between the religious sphere and the Government, likening overly rigid interpretations of official secularism to an "intellectual millstone that afflicts France."

On October 3, 2007, President Sarkozy met with Russian Orthodox Church Primate Alexis II during the Patriarch's first-ever visit to the country. Sarkozy extolled the "unprecedented and exceptional" visit as a sign of European Christians' collective will to affirm their shared moral heritage and to reject violence committed in the name of religion.

While Interior Minister in 2005, Sarkozy established a commission led by law professor Jean-Pierre Machelon that 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 religious group to have the legal status of an association of worship. The proposed reform would allow for associations of worship to integrate activities such as social events and book selling, thereby "enlarging the social presence" of such groups. The report proposals support Sarkozy's assertion in 2002 that the state should encourage a public form of Islam, moderated by social recognition and open practice. On January 24, 2008, Interior Minister Alliot-Marie, who is charged with managing state relations with the country's religious communities, dismissed much of the uproar surrounding President Sarkozy's proreligion comments and reiterated that the Government was only considering reforms that would modernize, not abolish, the 1905 secularism law. Alliot-Marie cited the recommendations of the Machelon Report.

The daily newspaper *Liberation* reported on February 26, 2008 that 100,000 persons and organizations had signed a petition to preserve the policy of official secularism against "attacks upon it in recent weeks by President Sarkozy [in which] he conflates personal convictions and his role as president." On February 4, 2008, the Education League, a French federation with nearly 2 million members that specializes in promoting civil dialogue and secular education programs, introduced the petition.

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 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 worship and](#) cultural 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 Resistance formed the 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 religious leaders 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. Public funding for mosques has been politically divisive.

The April 1, 2008 legal annulment of the marriage of two Muslims, following the husband's accusation that his wife had lied about her virginity, prompted controversy in the country's press as well as abroad about the propriety of the civil authorities granting annulment for such a reason and whether or not the annulment reflected "French values."

According to a May 5, 2008 Universal Periodic Review of the country conducted by the NGO Human Rights Watch, since 2003, the country has forcibly removed dozens of foreign residents accused of links to terrorism and extremism. Available Interior Ministry figures indicate that 71 individuals described as "Islamic fundamentalists" were forcibly removed from the country between September 2001 and September 2006. Fifteen of these were described as imams. Human Rights Watch cited as its primary concern the fact that those subject to a national security removal do not have the right to an automatic in-country appeal. Those who fear that removal would place them at risk of torture or ill treatment can petition for interim relief (référé-liberté), and the interim relief judge must decide within 48 hours whether to suspend the expulsion order and/or the order designating the country of return. A negative decision can be appealed to the highest administrative court in the country, the Conseil d'Etat. While authorities generally suspend removal while the interim relief judge considers the case, they are not obliged to do so. In addition to the 15 imams deported, 15 others remained under surveillance, according to press reporting.

On April 17, 2007, a Marseille administrative council, at the behest of a group of legislators, annulled a June 26, 2006 municipal council decision to facilitate building the Grand 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. Builders negotiated a new, fair market rate price later in 2007, and on June 30, 2008, the project organizers chose the winning architectural submission for a mosque that will accommodate 2,500 worshippers and cost \$13.5 million (€9 million). Organizers hope to have raised \$4.5 million (€3 million) from foreign and local contributors by the fall of 2008 and have set a goal of completing the project by mid-2012.

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."

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. In its fifth annual report (covering 2007) to the Prime Minister's office, published on April 3, 2008, MIVILUDES researchers highlighted what they identified as several increasingly pervasive cult-related dangers and reaffirmed the mission's commitment to protecting the public from psychological manipulation masquerading as religion. Among the new pitfalls identified in this latest edition are: encouraging drug use to change the mental state of religious adherents, inducing false memories to alienate individuals from their families, and employing new techniques to subvert the individual in favor of group identities. The report also devoted an entire chapter to cults' increasing efforts to project their influence internationally through the lobbying of and interaction with international forums including the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and specifically its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

MIVILUDES's new report and reaffirmation of its founding mission came a month after President Sarkozy's chief of staff elicited public controversy when she reportedly publicly disparaged the group's efficacy. On February 21, 2008, President Sarkozy hastened to quell a wave of criticism that followed the publication of a press interview in which his chief of staff was quoted as saying that non-mainstream religious cults and their impact on citizens were a "nonproblem." Presidential spokespersons reiterated Sarkozy's declaration that "excessive sectarianism is unacceptable and not allowed" and emphasized that "the Government has no plans to reduce its vigilance against sectarianism." On February 21, 2008, MIVILUDES President Jean-Michel Roulet acknowledged that the group's list of suspect cults was outdated.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, but the treatment of minority religious groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained an issue of concern.

On May 21, 2008, lawyers representing the Church of Scientology lodged a complaint with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers asserting that government policies in cases regarding minority religious associations including Scientology contravene the right to a fair trial and the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Scientology lawyers took issue with Prime Minister Fillon's April appointment of Georges Fenech, former President of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission on Sects and Youth, to evaluate the judiciary's capacity to "fight more efficiently" against "sectarian abuses." In addition to questioning Fenech's personal objectivity and fitness to undertake the analysis, Scientology legal counsel related "great concern in the minority religious community in France that [Fenech's] evaluation will create undue pressure on magistrates to prosecute and convict individuals and organizations due to their minority religious beliefs in contravention of fundamental human rights." Lawyers highlighted Fenech's stated intention to include in his analysis recommendations of how to ensure more effective and regular use of the About-Picard Law (see above), which critics assert is incompatible with basic principles of religious freedom.

Scientology lawyers argued that more aggressive application of the About-Picard Law could empower groups hostile to minority religions to initiate criminal complaints against religious groups, to represent the complainants using their own attorneys, to appear as private civil parties and thereby to undertake unjustified attacks on religious minorities as government proxies. Scientologist lawyers argued that according the status of "civil party" to biased organizations in the determination of a criminal case against minority religious groups would violate the impartiality of the tribunal. They also took issue with the law endowing any association recognized as being of public utility and existing for at least five years with the right to act as a civil party in suits against groups for "psychological or physical subjection." Specifically, Scientologist lawyers argued that the granting of this status implies a predetermination that negates the presumption of innocent until proven guilty.

On May 30, 2008, United Sikhs lawyers filed a legal challenge before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg to the law which banned the turban in public schools in 2004. On December 5, 2007, the Conseil d'Etat upheld the legal ban on wearing of ostensible religious signs. Six Sikh boys had been expelled for wearing the "keski" (an under-turban) to school, and the Court maintained that the "keski" was not a discreet sign but an ostensible manifestation of religion, which is prohibited by law. The court concluded in the interest of secularism in public schools that the permanent expulsion of a student who does not conform to the legal ban on wearing of ostensible religious signs "does not lead to an excessive infringement on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." The United Sikhs and French Turban Action Committee had argued before the court that the expulsion had infringed articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provided for the freedom to manifest one's religion and the right not to be discriminated against, respectively.

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.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, visited the country in 2005 and issued a report on her findings in 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."

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

On July 18, 2007, the Appeals Courts of Rouen found Catherine Picard, chairwoman of the National Union of Associations for the Protection of the Family and the Individual (UNADFI) and author of the About-Picard law against sects, guilty of slandering the Jehovah's Witnesses. The court stated that she had "discredited Jehovah's Witnesses" in an "extreme and biased way." Furthermore, she had "expressed opinions beyond the admissible limits of freedom of expression and lacking good faith." She was fined \$10,125 (€6,750) to be paid to the Jehovah's Witnesses for defamation. Picard was appealing the decision at the end of the reporting period.

In November 2007 public service announcements (PSAs) promoting fundamental human rights by Youth for Human Rights (YHRI), an NGO that receives support from the Church of Scientology, were taken off of the air by television station Gulli. The station was told by a MIVILUDES official that the PSAs should be removed from broadcast due to YHRI's affiliation with the Church of Scientology.

The ECHR has yet to rule on the appeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses whose 2002 court ruling to pay taxes on donations received currently totals more than the current value of the group's assets. The Jehovah's Witnesses are appealing the Court of Cassation's first and only decision to tax donations received by a not-for-profit corporation.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Senior government officials, up to and including President Sarkozy, have strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism, in particular on February 13, 2008, at the annual CRIF dinner where President Sarkozy became the first sitting president since Francois Mitterrand to attend the event that assembles the country's political elite, ranking diplomats, religious leaders, and leading private sector figures.

Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum for the Catholic Institute's Master's-level degree program entitled "Religion, Secularism, and Interculturalism," which welcomed its inaugural class of 30 students in February 2008. The program is in response to the fact that most of the approximately 1,200 imams preaching in the country come from overseas and that many preachers do not speak French, leading to problems communicating with their congregations and understanding local customs and laws. Initiated in collaboration with the Paris Mosque, the program, for which the Government provides 60 percent of funding, is aimed at providing students, including future clerics, a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms while avoiding theology per se. The goal is to develop an Islam within the country that will be of the country and foster integration. Theological instruction is left to the Paris Mosque, which has been running a four-year imam training program since 1993. The students are largely foreign-born, many hailing from North and sub-Saharan Africa. Despite acceptance from some Muslim groups, the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF) has remained aloof from the project. UOIF Vice-President Fouad Alaoui criticized the decision to situate the program at the Catholic Institute and publicly commented that "imam training is most properly handled by Muslims themselves."

In September-October 2007 legislative authorities, in an expedited ratification process, passed a law authorizing public access to the International Tracing Service's Bad Arolsen archives, a vast collection totaling approximately 30 million pages of pre-war, World War II, and post-war records of detention, concentration camp labor, and displaced persons. Lack of public access to the archive had impeded war survivors and the descendants of victims from gaining a measure of closure for their own personal tragedies. Scholars had also expressed eagerness to access the archive to enhance their understanding of the Nazi regime and to link their findings with the recollections of now elderly survivors.

On October 25, 2007, President Sarkozy presided over the induction of Avner Shalev, Director of Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem), into the Legion of Honor. Legion of Honor spokespersons characterized the decision as a "recompense for a man of peace, tolerance, and authenticity."

On October 1, 2007, President Sarkozy became the first President to attend an iftar—the evening meal breaking the daily fast during the Islamic month of Ramadan. Speaking at Paris' Great Mosque, Sarkozy promised the country's most prominent Muslim clerics that he would work with them to defend the rights of those within the country's Muslim community. On September 18, 2007, Prime Minister Fillon also attended an iftar at the Paris Grand Mosque where he, too, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to supporting the Muslim community in the country.

On September 5, 2007, Interior Minister Alliot-Marie visited the Jewish Consistory in Paris and renewed her pledge to combat anti-Semitism while lauding the role that religions play in transmitting values and "moral landmarks" to the society. Alliot-Marie cited decreased anti-Semitic activity and said that the Government would continue to extend police protection to some 254 synagogues and Jewish schools and cultural centers.

Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-President of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association, continued his efforts to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts. Rabbi Serfaty's efforts included sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for local Muslim students.

On July 11, 2007, the Justice Ministry announced the creation of 179 dedicated antidiscrimination posts to be collocated in district courts and staffed by a referring judge charged with managing local cases in close collaboration with civil society. Justice Minister Dati announced her goal of staffing each of these posts with an attorney specially trained in handling cases involving racial or religious discrimination. In late 2007 the antidiscrimination post in Ajaccio, Corsica organized an initial information-sharing seminar for 27 local NGOs working to combat racism and discrimination on the island.

The CNCDH report listed several new government antidiscrimination initiatives for law enforcement professionals that were implemented in 2007. Several courses and seminars are now required as prerequisites for promotion among police and domestic security professionals. Among the new initiatives is a day-long seminar during which 241 security professionals focused on operational discernment in working with the public.

In parallel with these new police training modules, the National Institute of Professional Formation, in

cooperation with the High Authority for Combating Discrimination, in September 2007 posted to the Internet a practical guide for combating discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and homophobia for security professionals. The guide is an antidiscrimination resource that includes models for taking personal statements from victims so as to ensure not only that victims are treated respectfully but also that discriminatory treatment is duly noted and acted upon.

On August 28, 2007, security authorities instituted the National File of Stadium Interdictions as a means of responding to sport-related violence frequently associated with racially or religiously discriminatory behavior. The new mechanism allows for more comprehensive information sharing internationally among sporting event security professionals by tracking sporting event arrests and noting cases involving incitement of racial hatred, racism, and anti-Semitism. There were 16 such arrests during the 2006-07 soccer season.

Following the 2005 creation of an Internet message analysis mechanism used to track virtual communication containing "unacceptable or shocking" content, in 2007 the Interior Ministry's found that 671 such messages were racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, or discriminatory. Among the 671 received messages, 324 were discriminatory or xenophobic; 297 provoked racial, ethnic, or religious hatred; 30 defended crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; 17 denied crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; and 3 justified discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In 2007 one-quarter of local police stations were evaluated using anonymous checks to verify that officers were treating citizens' complaints, including that of having been the victim of discrimination, with the requisite attention and assiduousness.

The Education Ministry continued to sponsor nationwide topics and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination. In 2007 the National Competition for the [Memory of the] Resistance and Deportation chose as its theme: "Aid given to those being persecuted and hunted in France during World War II as a form of resistance," a theme that elicited 46,383 junior high and high school student participants in the competition. High school students viewed, discussed, and gave presentations on 15 short films including "Soccer for Tolerance," in which French national soccer team players discuss the subjects of racism and discrimination and "The Paris Grand Mosque -- A Forgotten [Site of] Resistance."

In 2007 the Alsace Regional Council, in cooperation with the League of Human Rights, continued its annual "Month of the Other" program, initiated in 2005. Ten thousand students participated in a series of round tables, lectures, theatrical performances, and audio-visual presentations designed to sensitize students to the struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.

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 CNCDH, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported that 2007 witnessed a sharp decrease in anti-Semitic acts -- 386 events, a 33 percent decrease from the 571 reported in 2006. Violent anti-Semitic acts also dropped in 2007--106 as opposed to 137 in 2006 (down 22 percent). Anti-Semitic violence in schools also dropped sharply, down to 5 acts from 11 in 2006. CNCDH report authors asserted that "contrary to previous years, international events, particularly Middle East tensions, had practically no influence this year on anti-Semitism in France."

The CNCDH noted that its statistical totals for violent anti-Semitic acts in 2007 differed somewhat from the totals cited by the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community (SPCJ), which reported 143 violent anti-Semitic acts in 2007. CNCDH statisticians pointed out that the discrepancy derives from the CNCDH practice of "counting" events whereas the SPCJ "counts" the number of complaints lodged. In the case of one attack involving two victims, each of whom lodges a complaint, the approaches lead to different totals. The CNCDH plans in future reports to distinguish between events and victims to eliminate this counting discrepancy.

According to the CNCDH report, there were slightly fewer instances of anti-Semitic violence committed by

assailants of "Arab-Muslim" origin in 2007--36 of the 106 assaults registered (down from 38 of 137 in 2006). Authorities attributed 12 of the 106 assaults to members of the extreme right. Anti-Semitic threats coming from individuals of "Arab-Muslim" origin decreased more sharply in 2007 -- 32 of the 280 threats registered (down from 120 of 434 in 2006). Authorities attributed 117 of the 280 threats to members of the extreme right.

The 106 violent anti-Semitic acts registered in 2007 involved 64 acts of physical assault; 20 of damage to personal property; 7 of synagogue vandalism; 6 of cemetery or memorial vandalism; 6 of damage to professional space; 2 of school vandalism; and 1 of defacement of public space. Additionally, there were numerous reports of anti-Semitic slurs and the use of the word "Jew" as an insult that the Jewish community found offensive and hurtful.

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

On June 21, 2008, according to the European Jewish Press, a 17-year-old wearing a kippah or skullcap was attacked in Paris's 19th district. Five youths were detained after the Jewish teenager was beaten into a coma but were released without being charged. Prosecutors opened an investigation on June 24 into the attack.

On June 10-11, 2008, a marble plaque in Paris memorializing the deportation of 90 Jewish children to Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust was vandalized and broken beyond repair. Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë denounced the attack and pledged to erect a new memorial on the same spot.

On February 23, 2008, police arrested six individuals for physically assaulting and imprisoning a 19-year-old Jewish youth in Bagneux, the same Parisian suburb where Ilan Halimi was abused and killed by an extortionist gang in 2006. The victim was held against his will by his attackers for nine and a half hours before being set free by the group. Most of the attackers were in their 20s. Two of the assailants were of Muslim origin, two were French citizens, and another two were African and Portuguese immigrants. At the end of the reporting period, the attackers were still under investigation.

On February 8, 2008, three policemen in Amiens (75 miles north of Paris) were suspended after making Nazi salutes and shouting anti-Semitic and white supremacist slogans in a local bar. Interior Minister Alliot-Marie confirmed the incident and condemned the attack, stating, "this intolerable behavior ... is in total contradiction with the police force's code of ethics." The police inspector-general launched a disciplinary investigation.

On December 19, 2007, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, approximately 20 young persons violently attacked a 17-year-old Jewish youth. Police were unable to apprehend the perpetrators.

On August 9, 2007, a 23-year-old Jewish woman was attacked by two youths who beat her and stole her mobile phone while shouting anti-Semitic remarks. The victim sustained multiple bruises on her face and body. One of the alleged perpetrators was arrested.

On July 28, 2007, a man of North African origin beat a 23-year-old Jewish man violently with an iron bar. He was arrested and is being tried for "acts of violence against a person because of his religion."

On February 28, 2008, a Lyon appeals court upheld a prior 3-month suspended prison sentence and \$7,500 (€5,000) fine for National Front Vice-President Bruno Gollnisch for Holocaust denial. Gollnisch, who also serves as a European Parliament deputy for the right-wing Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty Party, was also required to pay \$82,500 (€55,000) in damages to plaintiffs.

On August 28, 2007, a Paris court sentenced Nizar Ouedrani to nine months in prison for anti-Semitic slurs and for physically assaulting an Orthodox Jew on July 21, 2007 in Paris.

On February 19, 2008, a Paris court handed down a six-month prison sentence (with parole eligibility after two months) to Stellio Capochichi, alias Kemi Seba, for reviving the radical anti-Semitic group "Tribe K," in violation of the Government's 2006 order that the group be disbanded. The judgment also barred Seba from running for elected office in the Sarcelles municipal elections.

On February 8, 2008, a Paris court sentenced National Front President Jean-Marie Le Pen to a three-month

suspended prison term and a \$15,000 (€10,000) fine for misrepresenting Nazi war crimes in a 2005 interview for the extreme right weekly *Rivarol*. Judges denounced Le Pen's "deliberate falsification of history [that] positively depicted the Gestapo as the French population's protective authority, glossing over the crimes it committed." Le Pen and two *Rivarol* employees were also required to pay \$1,500 (€1,000) in fines to each of the suits' civil parties—the Movement against Racism and for Friendship, the League of Human Rights, and the National Federation for Deportees and Resistance Fighters. Le Pen has been fined more than \$270,000 (€180,000) for similar comments dating as far back as 1987.

On December 21, 2007, the *Conseil d'Etat* upheld a Bordeaux appeals court's March 27, 2007 ruling that there are no grounds for prosecuting the country's national railway company (SNCF) for its role in deporting 75,000 Jews during World War II. In 2006 a lower court had ordered the SNCF to pay \$93,000 (€62,000) for its role in the deportations.

On November 9, 2007, in one of the most severe sentences for historical revisionism to date, a court in Saverne (near Strasbourg) condemned Vincent Reynouard to one year in prison and a \$15,000 (€10,000) fine for authoring a 16-page tract entitled "Holocaust? What They Are Hiding from You." Reynouard, who received a suspended sentence for the same crime in 1996, admitted to penning but not to distributing the leaflet which was sent to civic groups, museums, and mayors' offices throughout the country in 2005. Reynouard's lawyers lodged an immediate appeal, which temporarily suspended enactment of the judgment, and Reynouard expressed his intention to continue his revisionist writing.

On September 11, 2007, a Paris court handed down a public defamation sentence and \$10,500 (€7,000) fine to comedian Dieudonne for anti-Semitic comments made at a 2005 press conference.

According to *Maariv* (an Israeli newspaper), some elements of the Jewish community in the country are incensed with Paris 12th district mayoral candidate Jean-Marie Cavada for failing to respond to anti-Semitic statements made at a session of the electoral campaign by writer Yvan Stefanovitch.

The Government took steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. On April 15, 2008, Prime Minister Fillon, on the occasion of the Jewish Consistory's Bicentennial Celebration, publicly reiterated the Government's determination to remain vigilant against anti-Semitism before senior representatives of the Jewish community.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced assault, harassment, and vandalism; however, the situation improved in 2007, during which, according to the CNCDH, there were 321 racist and xenophobic (including anti-Muslim) acts recorded, a 9 percent decrease from the 352 acts committed in 2006. The trend was also reflected in a slight drop in the number of violent incidents (61 in 2007 as opposed to 64 in 2006). Among the 61 violent acts, 42 were committed against individuals of North African origin and 14 of the acts were characterized as being specifically anti-Muslim in character. Among the 260 racist and xenophobic threats and less serious material damage (graffiti) reported to the CNCDH, 156 (60 percent) were committed against individuals of North African origin, down from 195 (68 percent) in 2006. (The CNCDH collects data under the heading of "Racist and Xenophobic Actions," which include actions that are explicitly anti-Muslim in character. Disaggregation of racist acts and anti-Muslim acts was difficult.)

The 61 racist and xenophobic violent acts reported to the CNCDH in 2007 involved 31 acts of physical assaults; 10 of serious cemetery or memorial vandalism; 7 of mosque vandalism; 7 of damage to personal property; 3 of damage to public buildings; 2 of damage to professional spaces; and 1 of school vandalism. The 260 racist and xenophobic threats and less serious material damage (usually defacement by graffiti) reported to the CNCDH involved 121 acts of written or verbal (including by telephone) threats made to individuals; 39 of defacement of public buildings; 33 of defacement of private property or vehicles; 21 of defacement of mosques; 20 of defacement of professional space; 17 of defacement of schools; and 9 of defacement of cemeteries or memorials.

On April 23, 2008, NGO SOS Pilgrims President Zakaria Nana told the daily *Le Parisien* that 4,000 of its Muslim members planned to lodge a collective formal complaint with Paris authorities for fraud committed against them by travel organizations facilitating travel of local Muslims to Mecca. The number of pilgrims making the Hajj to Mecca from the country is growing rapidly: 23,000 in 2004, 36,500 in 2007, with 100,000

forecast to make the trip by 2015. According to Nana, 3,500 of the 40,000 would-be pilgrims in 2007 were not able to depart because of scheduling and organizational problems with contracted agencies, and some of the 3,500 had not yet been reimbursed. Of the 36,500 pilgrims from the country who entered Saudi Arabia last year, 8,000 did so with visas that had been forged by travel groups without the pilgrims' knowledge. Two-thirds of travelers complained of poor treatment on the part of their travel service providers.

On April 20, 2008, an intentionally set fire heavily damaged the entry of a small mosque in Colombiers, near Toulouse. Judicial sources confirmed on May 30, 2008, that five suspects had been remanded to custody for setting the fire. The five individuals were associated with an extreme right group and were believed to have committed the crime in commemoration of Adolph Hitler's birthday.

On June 3, 2008, a Paris court convicted former actress-turned-animal-rights-activist Brigitte Bardot of inciting racial hatred and fined her \$22,500 (€15,000). In 2006 Bardot wrote a letter to then-Interior Minister Sarkozy asserting that Muslims should be required to stun animals before slaughtering them during the Eid al-Adha religious holiday. She outraged Muslim and anti-racist activist groups with her comment, "I've had enough of being led by the nose by this whole population that is destroying us, destroying our country by imposing their ways." The 73-year-old Bardot has been fined on four occasions since 1997 based on the same charge.

On April 7, 2008, 150 persons representing Islam, Christianity, and Judaism gathered at the largest military cemetery, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, in a show of solidarity against the desecration of 148 Islamic tombs that took place there on April 5-6. Vandals spray-painted swastikas, racial slurs directly attacking Islam and Justice Minister Rachida Dati, herself of North African origin, and hung a pig's head in the Islamic section of the cemetery honoring the country's World War I veterans. Abdelkader Aoussedj, Vice-President of the regional Muslim Council of the Muslim Faith, condemned the act and expressed his appreciation on behalf of the Muslim community for the broad show of sympathy and support from representatives of other religious traditions and called upon his fellow Muslims to "remain calm in the face of provocation." Alain Tajchner, President of the Jewish Community of Lens, was among those present and reiterated calls for interfaith solidarity against intolerance.

On November 18, 2007, police in Nantes took four suspects into investigative custody for multiple counts of vandalizing the Ar-Rahma mosque construction site. Some of the suspects expressed to police their concern about the alleged threat posed by the proliferation of mosques in the country. Muslim community representatives, while denouncing the crime, stressed their appreciation for community support and prompt attention from authorities, including from Nantes' mayor and deputy mayor. Nouredine Sherkaoui, Secretary General for the regional Council of Muslim Faith, noted that unlike in past incidents, elected officials demonstrated support for the Muslim community; however, Ar-Rahma Mosque Association President Mohammed Boukhris remained critical of the general public's tepid acceptance of the idea of a public presence for Islam.

On March 12, 2008, a court upheld a prior ruling in favor of the satirical weekly, *Charlie Hebdo*, which published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, rejecting an appeal by a Muslim group, which said they incited hatred of Islam. The cartoons originally appeared in a Danish newspaper in 2006 and provoked violent protests in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in which 50 persons were killed. Several European publications reprinted them as an affirmation of free speech. Court authorities asserted the caricatures target only a portion of the Muslim community, do not constitute a direct attack against a religious group, and do not betray the limits of freedom of expression.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Islamic 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 October 9, 2007, a court in the northeastern town of Epinal handed down a suspended four-month prison sentence and a \$1,500 (€1,000) fine to the owner of a local bed and breakfast who refused service to a woman wearing a headscarf. Court authorities ordered Yvette Truchelut to pay an additional \$4,500 (€3,000) to the victim and her family and \$3,600 (€2,400) to the suit's NGO civil parties.

On May 22, 2008, an Orleans court sentenced a 26-year-old man to an 8-month suspended prison sentence

and \$1,500 (€1,000) fine for making death threats against Robert Redeker, a public high school teacher and writer from Saint-Orens-de-Gameville (near Toulouse), who attacked the Prophet Muhammad and Islam in a 2006 newspaper commentary and was forced to go into hiding under police protection after receiving multiple threats, including one diffused on a Muslim extremist 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."

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination during the reporting period. 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.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported 70 acts of vandalism to the police. Since January 2006, there have been 239 acts of vandalism against places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, including May 17, 2008 attacks with Molotov cocktails in Ales, Gard; a February 9, 2008 attempted arson in St. Jean de Luz in Pyrenees-Atlantiques; a December 11, 2007 cemetery vandalization in Chateaurenard, Bouches-du-Rhone; July 10, 2007 tire slashings during services in Rochefort, Charente-Maritime; and numerous acts of hate language spray-painted on places of worship.

The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three seven-member delegations representing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches. In addition, a three-member delegation represents the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represents the Anglican Communion. The council serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish communities, which addresses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

Representatives from the Embassy met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters. Embassy officers also met regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved with religious freedom. 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 European Jewish Congress, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center.

Embassy Paris conducts a robust public affairs outreach program to minority communities throughout the country. During the reporting period, working with the embassy minority outreach group, embassy officials visited more than a dozen communities in order to engage in dialogue about Islam in the United States, and seasonally to express good wishes for Islamic holidays. In addition, State Department officials support specific projects of reputable NGOs that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia such as SOS Racisme and the interfaith bridge-building efforts in the country's marginalized suburbs led by Rabbi Serfati.

As examples of one of the embassy's speakers' programs, State Department officials brought to the Embassy a speaker from the Southern Poverty Law Center who runs the "Teaching Tolerance" program nationwide in the United States. She reached out to the education community both at the university and primary/secondary levels. The Department's Senior Advisor on Islamic Affairs visited Paris in July 2007. The embassy Public Affairs office also conducted outreach with a group of young Muslim community leaders visiting from the United States, including a young woman wearing the headscarf who was able to foster dialogue among those with varying opinions on questions related to self-respect within a society where visible signs of religiosity are discouraged in public institutions.

The Embassy's International Visitor Leadership Program during the reporting period, in part due to special programs related to minority communities, included imams and other minority community leaders from throughout the country. The Youth Ambassadors Program, a new embassy initiative, provided an exchange

opportunity related to social entrepreneurship for youth leaders in underserved communities.

The Embassy partners with the country in sharing best practices for diversity in education, the workplace, and society, looking for effective models that best allow individuals with different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to live harmoniously.

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