



France

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

October 26, 2009

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, discriminatory treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists remained a concern. Some religious groups voiced opposition to 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, but there continued to be concerns about the treatment of some minority religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. A 2004 law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students 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 remained similar to 2007 levels (397 from 386 in 2007), according to the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH). There were 36 violent acts and 99 threats (down from 256 in 2007) directed against individuals of North African origin in 2008. Among the violent incidents, two were explicitly anti-Islamic in nature, targeting mosques. 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 64,100,000.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation.

According to the 2008 *Guide of the Catholic Church* in France, France is 65 percent Catholic, including those who never attend religious services. Of Catholics, only 5 percent go to church regularly.

There are an estimated five million to six 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 newspaper *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.

Protestants make up 2.1 percent of the population, Jewish and Buddhist religious groups 1 percent each, and Sikhs less than 1 percent.

According to French daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, there were approximately 1.5 million Protestants in France in 2008.

According to *La Croix*, there are approximately 500,000 Buddhists in the country, making it the country's fourth-largest religion. This may underrepresent the actual number of adherents, as it is difficult to distinguish between practicing Buddhists and the much larger number of persons who characterize themselves as sympathetic to certain Buddhist principles. Scholars distinguish between "sympathizers" (approximately 5,000,000), "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 largest 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. In all, there are 300 Buddhist places of worship in the country.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000 (70 percent Sephardic and 30 percent Ashkenazi). 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--5 percent of all Jews in a country--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, although they estimate approximately 120,000 are observant which would make it the fifth-largest religion.

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 January 2008 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 a recent study published by the French School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), there were 34,381 members of The Church of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons, at the end of 2007, 30 percent of whom are observant. The Church of Scientology has an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for 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.

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* (or *paroissiales*--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; violating 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 allocate a portion of their income tax 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 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. At the beginning of the 2008 academic year, public school cafeterias in Lyon serving 16,400 students began replacing beef with fish and eggs to satisfy the dietary requirements of certain religious groups. Lyon public officials, who characterized the decision as "an effort at consensus building aimed at respecting diversity," made the change after lengthy consultation with representatives of the major religious groups as well as prosecularism 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 carried out not only 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 persistently pursued reform of the official policy of secularism, arguing for a wider public role for religion in society. He addressed religion in several major speeches: in March 2009 at an event sponsored by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF); to religious leaders in France from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist faiths in January 2009; and during the Pope's visit in September 2008.

On March 2, 2009, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon were among approximately 850 high-profile guests from across the political and social spectrum at an annual dinner hosted by the CRIF. After participating in the Gaza donors' conference in Sharm el-Sheikh earlier in the day, President Sarkozy, the guest of honor, said in remarks that he "absolutely" wanted to be at the CRIF event in order to show "support and friendship" to the Jewish community. PM Fillon also gave a speech in which he emphasized his determination to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. PM Fillon announced the appointment of Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin to a special anti-Semitism post as Vice President of the National Information and Liberties Commission (CNIL) dedicated to monitoring Internet attacks and abuses in this area.

On January 12, 2009, President Sarkozy, in the wake of increased domestic violence in reaction to the Gaza crisis, used his annual New Year's meeting with top French religious figures to condemn "with the greatest force the unacceptable violence" against individuals, property, and religious buildings. Sarkozy called for peace and social cohesion among religions and a deepening of interreligious dialogue.

On September 12, 2008, President Sarkozy gave a speech alongside the Pope at the Elysée Palace, advocating a "positive secularism" that is respectful of its Christian roots. Sarkozy also reiterated government action to protect freedom of religion, to work to end attacks against worshippers and places of worship, and to continue interreligious dialogue with members from all faiths in the country. The speech was met with a wave of criticism from politicians and pundits. Francois Bayrou, head of the Democratic Movement (MoDem) Party, blasted the president in a full-

page interview in the newspaper *Journal du Dimanche* on September 14 for mixing religion and politics, "which is good neither for the republic nor for religion." Manuel Valls, a Socialist Party deputy who supports reforming the party along social democratic lines, castigated President Sarkozy in the same newspaper for "distorting the office of the presidency" by pushing religion to the fore in the public sphere.

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 for a religious group to have the legal status of an association of worship. The proposed reform would allow 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 Government made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. It is illegal to deny crimes against humanity. The Gaysot Act criminalizes questioning the existence of the category of crimes against humanity defined in the London Charter of 1945. The Government combats racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and by 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, 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.

On January 12, 2009, in the context of the Gaza crisis, State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara called a meeting of Muslim and antiracism civic organizations involved in disadvantaged communities to urge them to combat any "outbreak of anti-Semitism." The groups drafted a common statement called "Living Together" that was posted on the Internet. On the same day, the Grand Mosque in Paris issued a statement calling for Muslim communities in France to remain calm while also condemning violence directed at Jewish sites.

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 resolution 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, provision of 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 training foreign imams in the country's language, history, and civics.

On November 17, 2008, an appeals court in Douai in northern France overturned a lower court's ruling that annulled the marriage of a Muslim couple because the bride lied about her virginity. Holding that virginity was not a legal precondition for the marriage, the appeals court decision added that the wife's misrepresentation was not enough to justify an annulment. The original decision, announced on April 1, 2008, prompted sharp reactions in political and human rights circles about the role of Islam in the courts. After the November 17 ruling, Lille mayor Martine Aubry issued a statement saying she was delighted with the ruling, emphasizing that it was consistent with "European conventions for human rights and [was] respectful of the republic's values." The feminist movement *Neither Whores nor Submissives*, founded by State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara, issued a statement expressing "relief" in response to the decision.

New government-funded construction of mosques was expected to increase in future years in the cities of Marseille, Strasbourg, Nantes, Paris, Tours, Saint-Denis, and Cergy-Pontoise. According to Ministry of Interior 2008 estimates, there are 1,920 places of Muslim worship in France, 370 of which are in Paris, for the country's estimated 5 five million Muslims.

After much negotiation dating back to 2006, a new mosque that will accommodate 2,500 worshippers was slated to begin construction in Marseille in September 2009. The Grand Mosque of Marseille, which is estimated to cost \$13.5 million (€10 million) with a scheduled completion date of 2011, will feature a library, a bookstore, a Qur'anic school, and restaurant open to the public. The project was initially stalled by a legislative disagreement over whether the decision to facilitate building the mosque would have contravened the 1905 law separating church and state.

On December 3, 2008, the Grand Mosque of Creteil (Val-de-Mame) was inaugurated five years after the project was approved. The mayor of Creteil, Laurent Cathala, said the project overcame the complex issue of public financing of religious buildings.

In 2004 Parliament passed a law authorizing the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons."

MIVILUDES is charged by the Government with observing and analyzing "sect" or "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. MIVILUDES was created by presidential decree in 2002 and exists as an independent body in which the Prime Minister appoints the director. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions. In its sixth annual report (covering 2008) to the Prime Minister's Office, published on May 19, 2009, MIVILUDES researchers highlighted what they identified as several increasingly pervasive cult-related dangers and reaffirmed their commitment to protect the public from psychological manipulation masquerading as religion. The report indicated that the Government intends to implement greater operational control over sects through multidisciplinary teams led by the Ministry of Interior. The teams, due for activation in late 2009, would observe religious sects and take possible legal action when necessary based on MIVILUDES' recommendations. 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 United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, specifically its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, under the guise of NGOs working to defend religious freedom.

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 reporting period, but the treatment of minority religious groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained an issue of concern.

On September 23, 2008, Prime Minister Fillon appointed Georges Fenech the new president of MIVILUDES, replacing Jean-Michel Roulet. Fenech, a former Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) deputy representing Rhône, is known for his opposition to Scientology, among other groups. As a judge from 1988 to 1995, Fenech conducted investigations into Scientology's activities that led to the conviction of several members for second-degree murder after the suicide of another Scientologist. Scientologist spokesperson Daniele Gounord condemned Fenech's selection as "scandalous." Legal counsel for the Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP), an association of minority religions and related organizations of which Scientology is a member, called Fenech's appointment "a backward step for religious freedom and tolerance in France." Before his appointment as president of MIVILUDES, Fenech was tasked by Prime Minister Fillon in April 2008 to research sectarian abuses and present a report to the Prime Minister. Fenech's report, "Justice Faced with Sectarian Abuses," was issued by the Prime Minister's Office in June 2008 and outlines 12 recommendations for strengthening judicial efforts to combat sectarian excesses, part of an effort to harmonize European Union rules in this area. CAP legal counsel took issue with the report, questioning Fenech's personal objectivity and neutrality on the issue of religious tolerance.

Legal counsel for CAP 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. CAP legal counsel argued that according the status of "civil party" to what they deem a biased organization in the determination of a criminal case against minority religious groups would violate the impartiality of the tribunal. They also found fault with the law which endowed 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, CAP legal counsel argued that granting this status implies a predetermination that negates the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

On June 15, 2009, the public prosecutor in a high profile fraud trial against seven of the Church of Scientology's top officials and two of its branches asked the Paris Correctional Court to designate Scientology a criminal enterprise that would result in an effective ban in the country, which could be followed by bans in other EU countries. Maud Coujard, the lead prosecutor in the case, recommended that fines of \$2.77 million (€2 million) and suspended multiyear jail terms be levied against the leaders, a Scientology center, and its French bookstores if convicted on charges of organized fraud and illegally practicing as pharmacists. The trial stems from a complaint made in 1998 by a woman who claimed Scientologists recruited her outside a Paris metro station and misled her into paying some \$30,000 for books and materials. A judicial decision was expected in the fall. Fenech noted that if the court upholds the prosecutor's recommendation, "it could be possible to also order dissolution of other structures of the [Scientology] movement in France."

The 2009 MIVILUDES report on dangerous "sects and cults" referred to Jehovah's Witnesses 13 times in connection with antisect associations in Europe. The Jehovah's Witnesses report that during the Europe one radio interview about the report's release, Amélie Cladière, the MIVILUDES General Secretary, "mischaracterized the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and insinuated sectarian practices." Jehovah's Witnesses report frequent denial of requests to visit fellow believers in prison to provide worship, literature, and programs of the sort granted to other religious groups that society views as mainstream.

On December 15, 2008, a legal challenge to the law banning the wearing of ostensible religious signs in public schools was filed by the United Sikhs lawyers before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. A similar legal challenge was also filed by United Sikhs lawyers on May 30, 2008, before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Preceding these motions was a December 2007 French Conseil d'Etat ruling that upheld the legal ban on wearing of ostensible religious signs. These legal challenges by United Sikhs lawyers relate to the expulsion in 2004 of six Sikh boys for wearing the "keski" (an under-turban) to school. The Conseil d'Etat in its 2007 ruling

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 upon articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provide for the freedom to manifest one's religion and the right not to be discriminated against, respectively. At the end of the reporting period, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and ECHR had not rendered a decision on the legal challenges.

On December 15, 2008, in addition to the motion filed above, United Sikhs lawyers also filed a legal challenge before the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of Ranjit Singh and Shingara Singh regarding the Government's refusal to issue a resident card and passport because the plaintiffs refused to remove their turban for their identification photos. At the end of the reporting period, a decision had not been rendered in this case.

On November 27, 2008, Shingara Mann Singh from Sarcelles, who refused to remove his turban as required when taking photos to receive his driver's license, lost a legal challenge before the ECHR. ECHR judges ruled unanimously that French regulations prohibiting head coverings when posing for identification papers did not constitute interference within the right of the freedom of religion. The Court held that while Singh's religious rights might have been infringed upon, the Government justifiably banned wearing the turban specifically in the driver's license photo on the grounds that the turban covered the applicant's identifiable ears, posing a risk of fraud and falsification.

In December 2008 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, asked the Government to reexamine the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools. There were no reports that the Government reviewed the 2004 law during the reporting period. Jahangir has repeatedly asked the Government to reconsider the law. For example, in 2007 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 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, thereby adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved.

At the end of the reporting period, Catherine Picard, chairwoman of the National Union of Associations for the Protection of the Family and the Individual (UNADFI) was in the process of appealing a decision against her rendered by the Appeals Court of Rouen on July 18, 2007, for slandering the Jehovah's Witnesses. In its July 2007 decision, the Court fined Picard \$10,125 (€6,750) to be paid to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The ECHR had not ruled on the appeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses whose 2002 court ruling to pay taxes on donations received totaled more than the value of the group's assets. The Jehovah's Witnesses were appealing the Court of Cassation's first and only decision to tax donations received by a not-for-profit corporation. The case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed 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, strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism.

On June 7, 2009, the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, designated the Dalai Lama an Honorary Citizen of the city.

Twenty-five students attended the Catholic Institute's Master's-level degree program entitled "Religion, Secularism, and Inter-culturalism" training, including 10 foreign imams and 15 military chaplains. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum for the training program that began in February 2008. The program addresses the fact that most of the approximately 1,200 imams preaching in the country come from overseas and do not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations and their understanding of local customs and laws. Initiated in collaboration with the Paris Mosque, the program, for which the Government provides 60 percent of funding, is intended to provide 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 administered a four-year imam training program since 1993. The students are primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. The training, which focuses on imams, has been well-received by the country's religious communities, including Muslims, and is open to high-level officials and clergy from all religions, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations.

On April 7, 2009, the Ministry of Interior confirmed the expulsion of an imam for making anti-Semitic remarks during the training offered by the Catholic Institute of Paris to future imams. Abdessamad Merimi, a Moroccan citizen who preached in the Paris suburb of Grigny, made anti-Semitic remarks on three occasions during a lecture on Judaism during the training. Fellow students, shocked by Merimi's remarks, immediately notified the director of the Institute.

On September 22, 2008, the criminal affairs director from the Ministry of Justice sent a request to public prosecutors to address an appraisal of antidiscrimination efforts in their areas. The request followed the July 2007 announcement by the Justice Ministry of the creation of 179 dedicated antidiscrimination posts to be located 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. The results of this request were to be released in the 2008 criminal policy report, which at the end of the reporting period had not been published.

On September 15, 2008, against a backdrop of rising crime in the 19 district, the police announced new initiatives to combat anti-Semitism and protect Jewish places of worship. After a meeting with Jewish groups, law enforcement officials announced the launch of a telephone hotline and e-mail address for reporting anti-Semitic acts.

At the end of the reporting period, the CNCDH report listed several new government antidiscrimination initiatives required for law enforcement professionals' promotions, among them a day-long seminar during which 1,710 security professionals had been trained by the end of 2008 in operational discernment in working with the public. Further, a guide written by the independent High Authority for the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality

(HALDE) and the police training center is given to all law enforcement personnel and made available through the intranet.

At the end of 2008, the Interior Ministry reported a positive trend in "unacceptable or shocking" content as measured by an Internet message analysis mechanism, down from the 2007 number. (The 2007 number is reported first/The 2008 number second.): 671/77 such messages were racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, or discriminatory. Among the 671/77 received messages, 324/8 were discriminatory or xenophobic; 297/53 provoked racial, ethnic, or religious hatred; 30/6 defended crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; 17/8 denied crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; and 3/2 justified discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In 2008 150 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 care and attention.

The Education Ministry continued to sponsor nationwide topics and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination. In 2008 the school districts of Aix-Marseille, in the South, created and implemented teams to train school officials and teachers regarding discrimination prevention.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the reporting period, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and maintain open lines of communication among different faith communities.

The CNCDH, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported that 2008 witnessed a leveling in anti-Semitic acts--397 compared to 402 reported in 2007. The number of violent anti-Semitic acts reported also remained level in 2008--100 acts, and 106 in 2007, although the slight difference in reporting for both acts overall and violent ones was in a positive direction. Reported anti-Semitic violence in schools declined, from five acts in 2007 to two acts in 2008. CNCDH report authors asserted that contrary to previous years, international events, particularly Middle East tensions, had a profound influence on anti-Semitism in the country, particularly reaction to the conflict in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009.

The CNCDH noted that its statistical totals for violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008 differed somewhat from the totals cited by the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community (SPCJ), which reported 100 violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008. 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 was a 5 percent increase in instances of anti-Semitic violence committed by assailants of "Arab-Muslim" origin in 2008, slightly up from 2007. Authorities attributed 11 percent of these assaults to members of extreme right movements and gangs.

The 100 violent anti-Semitic acts registered in 2008 involved 53 acts of physical assault, 26 of damage to personal property, nine of synagogue vandalism, four of cemetery or memorial vandalism, four of damage to professional space, two of school vandalism, and two of defacement of public space. Additionally, there were numerous reports of anti-Semitic slurs and the misuse of the word "Jew" as an insult that the Jewish community found offensive and hurtful.

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

On May 22, 2009, the Government announced that since 1999, it had paid \$569 million (€410 million) through the Commission for the Compensation of Jewish Victims of Despoilment (CIVS) to victims despoiled in the country during German occupation in World War II.

On May 20, 2009, the Ministry of Interior announced it was seeking to dissolve a "Tribe-K" front-group known as the Kemi Seba Youth Organization (JKS), which authorities accuse of promoting racial and religious violence. On April 3, 2009, the Paris Court of Appeals sentenced Stello Capochichi, alias Kemi Seba, former leader of disbanded radical anti-Semitic group "Tribe K," to an eight-month suspended prison sentence for spreading anti-Semitic remarks on his Internet website in August 2006. Seba wrote on his website that international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Health Organization, were organizations "run by Zionists who impose living conditions on Africa and the African Diaspora that are so excremental that it makes the Auschwitz concentration camp seem like heaven on earth." He was charged with libel, incitation to racial hatred, and contesting crimes against humanity.

On May 15, 2009, a Nanterre court sent to correctional court six individuals arrested in February 2008 for physically assaulting and imprisoning a Jewish youth in Bagneux. The victim was held against his will by his attackers for nine and a half hours before being set free by the group.

On May 3, 2009, during a program on Radio J, a Jewish community radio station, President Sarkozy's General Secretary, Claude Gueant, condemned the initiative of controversial comic Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala to field an "anti-Zionist" electoral list for the European elections on June 7, calling it "absolutely outrageous." Representatives of President Sarkozy's office asked the Ministries of Justice and the Interior to find a way to prevent the list from being submitted, but these efforts were unsuccessful due to constitutional concerns. Persons on Dieudonné's "Anti-Zionist" list failed to win seats in the June 7 European elections.

On April 29, 2009, 27 members belonging to the self-styled "Gang of Barbarians" went on trial in the torture-murder of 23-year-old French national Ilan Halimi, a Jewish youth who was kidnapped in January 2006 in the Paris suburb of Sceaux. He was held hostage and tortured for 24 days before being left for dead next to some railroad tracks in Saint-Genevieve-des-Bois. Halimi died of his injuries while being transported to the hospital. Despite requests from the victim's family and several Jewish institutions, the trial was held behind closed doors because two of the accused were under 18 at the time of the crime. The trial was expected to last until July 10. Gang leader Youssouf Fofana faced life imprisonment if convicted. He was alleged to have admitted he committed the crime because Halimi was Jewish.

On December 26, 2008, Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala sparked a firestorm of criticism for giving a fictitious award to Holocaust denier and fellow comic Robert Faurisson. Through a stagehand dressed as a WWII-era Jewish deportee wearing a yellow star of David, Dieudonné presented Faurisson an award for "social unacceptability and insolence" at the end of his show at the Zenith theater in Paris. The event was applauded by the more than 5,000 fans in attendance, some of whom included figures from the political far-left and -right, including former National Front presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. Numerous groups opposed to racism and anti-Semitism, including the CRIF, and Minister of Culture Christine Albanel, condemned the event. Dieudonné has been regularly convicted and fined for Holocaust denial and speech that incites racial or ethnic hatred, both of which are illegal in the country. He was facing a judicial inquiry for describing the Holocaust as an "official religion." The Paris prosecutor's office on December 29, 2008, opened a preliminary investigation into the matter. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. If convicted, Dieudonné faced a maximum six-month prison term and a \$30,000 fine.

On October 22, 2008, two Jewish teenagers were attacked in Vitry-sur-Seine by 10 youth. Six persons were arrested. The investigation was ongoing.

On September 6, 2008, three Jewish teenage boys were attacked in the 19th district of Paris in what police authorities initially called a probable anti-Semitic incident; however, upon further investigation it appeared to be gang-related. Police investigators said the victims and one assailant had in their possession or were wearing yarmulkes during the time of the incident. Six aggressors allegedly beat the teenagers, with two of the three victims suffering broken noses. Prosecutors announced that five youths, including two minors, were under investigation for "voluntary violence as a group," without including anti-Semitism among possible motives in the case. One officer told the press that the incident appeared to have been a low-level clash among neighborhood teens "making mischief."

On August 13, 2008, Paris police detained the owner and sales clerk of a woman's clothing store, Belle Star, in the Belleville (19) district of Paris for selling t-shirts bearing the WWII-era Nazi prohibition, "Park Entry Forbidden to Jews." The store owner and her daughter face up to one year in prison if found guilty of inciting racial hatred for promulgating anti-Semitic inscriptions. The case was ongoing.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced a killing, and instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism; however, the situation improved in 2008, during which, according to the CNCDH, there were 97 racist and xenophobic (including anti-Muslim) acts recorded, a more than 60 percent decrease from the 321 acts committed in 2007. The trend was also reflected in a drop in the number of violent incidents from 614 in 2007 to 54 in 2008. Among the 54 violent acts, 36 were committed against individuals of North African origin, and two of the acts were characterized as being specifically anti-Muslim in character.

The 97 racist and xenophobic violent acts reported to the CNCDH in 2008 involved 54 acts of physical assaults, seven of serious cemetery or memorial vandalism, two of mosque vandalism, 19 of damage to personal property, two of damage to public buildings, six of damage to professional spaces, and two of school vandalism. The 370 racist and xenophobic threats and less serious material damage (usually defacement by graffiti) reported to the CNCDH involved 137 acts of written or verbal (including by telephone) threats made to individuals, 215 acts of graffiti on private property or vehicles, and 18 provocative pamphlets and mailings.

On September 8, 2008, a Muslim youth was shot and killed in Paris' 19th district. Mao Peninou, security advisor to the district president, expressed concern about security in the district, noting that this was the first killing with a gun in the district since 2001.

On December 20, 2008, a mosque in Saint-Priest (a suburb of Lyon) was the target of arson. Although the building suffered limited damage and no one was hurt in the blaze, several copies of the Qur'an were burned. Police were searching for the perpetrators. Approximately 1,000 individuals demonstrated peacefully in front of the mosque on December 21, including prominent Socialist Party mayor of Lyon, Gerard Collomb, the rector of the city's Grand Mosque, Kabel Kaptane, and Jewish leaders--to denounce anti-Muslim sentiment and actions in the country. Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie announced December 20 that the investigators would use "all means necessary" to solve the case.

On December 17, 2008, 10 members of the Neo-Nazi group "LW" were convicted for the April 20 Colombiers mosque-burning outside of Toulouse. Eight "LW" members received 18-month prison sentences, while two of the group's leaders each received a maximum three-year sentence for the crime. The group was ordered to pay fines totaling \$25,025 (€17,500) to the Muslim community and an anti-racist group.

On December 9, 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy denounced as "revolting" and "repugnant" racism directed against the Jewish and Muslim communities in reference to the desecration of Muslim and Jewish graves with swastikas and anti-Islamic slogans at Arras military cemetery on December 8. The incident took place on the eve of the Eid al-Adha holiday. Politicians and religious organizations also roundly condemned the attack, and the Secretary of State

for Veterans Affairs immediately announced the installation of eight video cameras in the cemetery.

On September 10, 2008, two neo-Nazi youth were put under investigation for their alleged role in an earlier desecration of the Arras military cemetery. Both were charged for the profanation of a sepulture for reasons of race or religion and for the degradation of property belonging to others. The case was ongoing.

On September 4, 2008, approximately 40 swastikas and 50 racist slogans, such as "death to Arabs," "white power," and other profanity-laden language, were spray-painted inside the entrance at Rene Cassin d'Agde high school outside of Montpellier. School officials shielded incoming students from the affected areas of the building and canceled classes for the day. French Minister of Education Xavier Darcos firmly condemned the incident and reiterated the Government's commitment to combat extremism and racism. Local Socialist Party leaders and French anti-racist organizations joined Darcos in condemning the incident.

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 instead.

On December 4, 2008, two French Muslim schoolgirls in Caen, who were expelled for refusing to remove their headscarves during gym class in 1999, had their legal case brought before the ECHR. While the ECHR judges were sympathetic to the girls, stating that wearing a religious symbol was not incompatible with the principle of secularism, the judges concluded that, according to Article 9 (freedom of thought and religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights, school authorities did not expel the two girls due to their religion; rather, authorities expelled them for not conforming to the rules set forth by the school district. The ECHR judges held that rules governing the public order preempt the protection of personal liberty.

On September 4, 2008, six Muslim schoolgirls were sent home by schoolmaster Eric Rottier of the Lislet Geoffroy, a Saint-Denis de la Réunion public high school, for violating the 2004 law that forbids wearing religious symbols in public places. Two of the girls returned to school on September 5 after agreeing to remove their veils. The four others left the school, opting to continue their studies via correspondence courses with a Qur'anic school in Saint-Denis.

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 55 acts of vandalism against places of worship in the country, including Molotov cocktails and firearms directed at Jehovah's Witnesses' property. Jehovah's Witnesses' officials noted that of the 55 attacks during the reporting period, two were against individuals who were engaging in door-to-door proselytizing.

The Jehovah's Witnesses awaited a ruling during the reporting period by the ECHR on the admissibility of a case contesting the government's assessment of their donations at a 60 percent tax rate. The government had imposed the high rate relative to other religious groups after ruling the group to be a harmful cult. The assessed tax, which totaled more than \$77.5 million (€57 million) would consume all of the group's buildings and assets in the country and could close them down.

On October 1, 2008, between 600 and 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses rallied in front of the departmental government offices in Vosges to protest allegations of pedophilia. The allegations and the demonstration arose from a property

dispute in the Vosges town of Deyvilliers (1,400 inhabitants), where the Jehovah's Witnesses were planning to build a large church (or Kingdom Hall). A local environmental group, Aded, has lobbied since 2004 against construction of the 1,500-seat facility, which would include a 500-car-space parking lot. In an apparent effort to rally public opinion, Aded organized a public meeting in the town with an American former Jehovah's Witness, Bill Bowen, who is an outspoken critic of the faith. Media reported that at the meeting, Bowen criticized the church's leadership for, in his view, ignoring alleged sexual abuse of minors within the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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.

In March 2009 Rabbi Michel Serfaty, coPresident of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association, traveled to Gaza with French Imam Chalghoumi and Jewish writer Marek Halter in an effort to strengthen relations and dialogue for peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Rabbi Serfaty continued to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts, and by sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for local Muslim students.

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. The Embassy also conducted regular outreach to Muslim communities throughout the country, and the Ambassador hosted an annual Iftar with a focus on young Muslim leaders. Farah Pandith, Senior Advisor for Muslim Outreach in Europe, continued to conduct outreach. The Embassy also hosted the visit of a prominent American imam who provided a leadership example for interfaith dialogue.

The Embassy conducts a robust public affairs outreach program to minority communities throughout the country. The Embassy also played a role in supporting projects of reputable NGOs that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, such as SOS Racisme.

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, now in its second year, provided an exchange opportunity related to social entrepreneurship for youth leaders in underserved communities.

The Embassy partners with the country's leaders in a range of sectors to share best practices for managing diversity, promoting effective models to allow individuals with different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to live harmoniously.