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France

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and most other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public and others provide for additional monitoring of minority religious groups. During the reporting period, the government proposed draft legislation that would prohibit the wearing of face-covering veils in public. Some religious groups criticized the proposed legislation because if passed it would restrict religious freedom.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice, but there continued to be concerns about the treatment of some minority religious groups and certain legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government has a stated policy of monitoring "dangerous" sectarian activity through the Inter-Ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat Against Sectarian Aberrations (MIVILUDES). Discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and other groups MIVILUDES considered "dangerous sects" or "cults" remained a concern. Such groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups and acts of discrimination against these groups.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. The country is home to Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities. Members of these and other groups were victims of violent physical attacks, attacks on their places of worship, and discrimination. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to strongly condemn anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and racist violence, and the government provided increased security for Jewish and Muslim 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 64.7 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. A December 2009 poll in the Catholic daily *La Croix* estimated that 64 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Although Catholicism is the primary religion, only 4.5 percent attend religious services regularly.

With an estimated five to six million Muslims, Islam is the second largest religion in the country and accounts for 8 to 10 percent of the population. According to an August 2009 survey in *La Croix*, 33 percent of Muslims surveyed said they observed Islam's five prayers daily. Mosque attendance for Friday prayers and Ramadan observance were 23 percent and 70 percent respectively. The Muslim population primarily consists of immigrants from North Africa and former sub-Saharan colonies and their descendants.

Religious groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Protestants, Buddhists, Jews, evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox Christians, Scientologists, Mormons, and Sikhs.

According to the French Protestantism Federation, there are approximately one million Protestants. The French Buddhist Union estimates that there are approximately 770,000 Buddhist sympathizers and practitioners. The Buddhist population mainly consists of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants, with a substantial minority of native French converts and sympathizers. The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000, 70 percent of whom are Sephardic and 30 percent Ashkenazi. According to press reports, more than 60 percent of Jews are not highly observant and celebrate at most the High Holy Days.

According to press reports, membership in evangelical churches is growing, with as many as 450,000 adherents. There are more than 2,000 evangelical churches, including African-style "prosperity" churches in the suburbs of Paris, composed primarily of African and Antillean immigrants. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, there are approximately 120,000 observant members. Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000, of which the vast majority are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches.

Other religious groups include the Church of Scientology, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Sikhs. The Church of Scientology estimates that it has 50,000 members. According to Mormons, there are 35,000 members, 30 percent of whom are observant. According to United Sikhs in France, there are approximately 10,000 to 11,000 Sikhs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and most other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public and others provide for additional monitoring of minority religious groups. During the reporting period, the government proposed draft legislation that would prohibit the wearing of face-covering veils in public. Some religious groups criticized the proposed legislation because if passed it would restrict religious freedom.

A long history of conflict between the Catholic Church and the Republic led the state to break its ties with the church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining secularism as a republican value. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and state is the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom and prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

The constitution and laws, as well as international and European covenants, to which the country is bound, protect the right of individuals to choose, change and practice their religion. The constitution provides that the country "shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs." Similarly,

the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which is part of the current constitution, provides, "No one may be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious ones, as long as the manifestation of such opinions does not interfere with the established Law and Order."

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The right to religious freedom is protected. Interference with religious freedom is subject to criminal penalties, including fines and imprisonment. Moreover, individuals who are defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of the law being applied to them.

Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. It is illegal to deny crimes against humanity as defined in the 1945 London Charter. Crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature are prohibited, and "hate" crimes face increased punishments. Thus, for certain crimes the penalties are increased when the offence is committed because of the victim's actual or supposed membership or non-membership of a given ethnic group, nation, race or religion. The government may expel aliens for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons."

The 2009 report of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) continued to list several new government antidiscrimination initiatives required for law enforcement professionals' promotions, among them training for more than 550 security professionals in operational discernment in working with the public since January 1, 2009. 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 officers and made available through the intranet. In 2009, 1,338 judicial police officers completed required training on respecting anti-discrimination laws and ethics while 629 police captains awaiting promotion attended a course on discrimination organized by the National School of Police Officers.

The government does not give direct financing to religious organizations to build mosques, churches, or synagogues. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to organizations at advantageous rates. The government also may fund cultural organizations with a religious connection.

On June 3, 2010, the city of Paris announced the building of an Institute of Islamic Cultures in the neighborhood of La Goutte d'Or, which is intended to showcase the diversity of Islam. The facility is designed to cover 4,500 square meters, with separate buildings devoted to cultural and religious activities. The city has committed \$27 million (22 million euro) for construction of the cultural space, while private funds are expected to finance the facilities for religious practice, including two prayer halls. The new prayer halls are designed to help relieve overcrowding at the local mosque. The inauguration of the Institute of Islamic Cultures is scheduled for 2013, just before the end of the second term of Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë.

After much negotiation dating to 2006, Mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin of Marseille presided over a small ceremony on November 6, 2009, to present officially the construction permit for the Grand Mosque of Marseille to Nourredine Cheikh, the former president of the Mosque of Marseille Association. The presidents of the national and regional Muslim religion councils also attended the ceremony. The Grand Mosque of Marseille is intended to accommodate more than 3,500 worshippers inside and an estimated three to four thousand on the external grand esplanade. The project also is expected to feature a cultural center, library, bookstore, Qur'anic school, and a restaurant open to the public. The estimated combined cost of the mosque facilities and the cultural center is \$27 million (22 million euro). The land on which the mosque is to be constructed is expected to be leased by the government to the mosque association under a 99-year lease with rent set at \$368 (300 euro) per year, and several foreign governments, including those of Algeria, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, have expressed an intention to help fund construction of the mosque. French government officials made verbal commitments to provide funding assistance for construction of the cultural center. Groundbreaking took place in January 2010 with projected completion planned for June 2011, although funding challenges have raised doubts as to whether this

time-line is attainable. Marseille has a population of 900,000, including approximately 300,000 Muslims of North African origin and 90,000 individuals of sub-Saharan African origin who are also mostly Muslim.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day.

On May 19, 2010, the cabinet approved a proposed law prohibiting the covering of one's face in public. The National Assembly approved the government proposal in July, and it will likely be debated in the Senate in September. Although not explicitly described in the draft bill, it was widely recognized that this proposal was intended to prohibit Muslim women from wearing the full Islamic veil which covers the entirety of the face and is often referred to as the "burqa" or "niqab." If the law is approved by parliament and survives possible constitutional challenges, it could impose a fine of 150 euro (approximately \$184) on violators and/or require attendance at a course in citizenship. Additionally, those who coerce another person on account of gender, by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority to cover his or her face would be subject to a fine of 30,000 euro (approximately \$36,813) and receive up to one year in prison, with the fine and sentence doubled if the victim is a minor. Following passage, application of the law would be stayed for a period of six months, during which time Justice Minister Michele Alliot-Marie said that the government, with help of civil society organizations such as the French Council for the Muslim Faith (CFCM), would educate the public about the implications of the new law and explain that "the full veil is not a religious obligation." According to Ministry of Interior estimates, only approximately 2,000 women in the country have adopted the full Islamic veil.

The country's highest administrative body, the Council of State, has twice issued advisory opinions questioning the legality of the proposed law, warning that a total public ban risks violating the constitution and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It is likely that the law will face a challenge in the country's highest constitutional court, the Constitutional Council, before its promulgation. In the event that the law is eventually struck down by the Constitutional Council, a popular referendum could override the decision.

The public debate on this problem intensified when President Sarkozy condemned burqas as "not welcome on French soil" during a speech on June 22, 2009. National Assembly President Bernard Accoyer appointed 32 lawmakers from across the political spectrum to a parliamentary fact-finding committee to study the wearing of the burqa in the country. The committee released a 700-page report on January 26, 2010, calling for a law banning veils that "conceal one's face" in government office buildings, public hospitals, schools, and transport.

The political debate over the wearing of face-covering veils has divided parliament, society, and the Muslim community, although polling has tended to suggest popular support for some sort of restriction on the wearing of the full veil. The Socialist Party opposition to an overall ban on face-covering veils was split, with some arguing the problem was being used to divert attention from more urgent matters while others questioned the constitutionality of the government proposal, preferring a ban limited to government buildings and public transport. A small minority of the opposition in the National Assembly did, however, vote in favor of the complete ban. Most opposition deputies refused to participate in the vote.

CFCM backed the partial ban on face-covering veils on January 26, but rejected the idea of extending the ban to all public places out of fear it would "stigmatize" Muslim women. CFCM President Mohammed Moussaoui has stated that while he personally opposes the burqa, he believes that leaders should discourage its use through education rather than legislation. The CFCM and the Union of French Islamic Organizations (UOIF) have advocated establishing a national institute on the study of Islam and the creation of a parliamentary study group on Islamophobia. The NGO Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores Nor Submissives), a feminist organization founded by Minister of Urbanization Fadela Amara, demonstrated in support of a potential ban on full Islamic veils on January 25 in Paris. Donning full veils, members maintained silence for hours to indicate that "the burqa is a symbol of oppression against women," said the group's president Sihem Habchi.

With respect to the law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, the government reported in its 2010 response to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, that there were no disciplinary cases brought under the law against students at the commencement of the 2009 school year, which suggested to the government a public desire to conform to the law's provisions.

Although not legally required, religious organizations may apply for tax-exempt status and register to gain official recognition. The government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes, and 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. Although not tax exempt, a cultural association may engage in profit-making activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories. For example, Mormons 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 at the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose, and a process to appeal the initial decision of a prefecture is available. To qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include religious training and the construction of buildings serving the religion. Among excluded activities are those purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. In addition, the group's actions must not pose a risk to public order.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 Protestant associations, 15 Jewish associations, approximately 30 Islamic associations, and approximately 100 Catholic associations have tax-exempt status; the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-exempt status.

According to the 1905 law, the government does not tax associations of worship on the donations 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, the government may change the association's status and require it to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

Since Alsace-Lorraine was part of the German Empire during the passage of the 1905 law separating church and state, the region maintains its own local law and applies its own customs and laws on specific problems. Enjoying special legal and tax status, adherents of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious organization in a system administered by the national government.

The national or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and state, which put an end to the funding of religious groups by the state. In Alsace and Moselle, however, special laws allow local governments to provide financial support for the building of religious edifices.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before travel to the country. All missionaries who wish to remain longer than 90 days must obtain long-duration visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must provide a letter from their sponsoring religious organization in order to apply with the local prefecture for a temporary residence card.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Religious instruction

is not given in public schools, but facts about religious groups are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. During the 2009 academic year, public school cafeterias in Lyon served fish and eggs to satisfy the dietary requirements of certain religious groups in "an effort at consensus building aimed at respecting diversity," after Lyon public officials held lengthy consultations with representatives of major religious groups and pro-secularism groups. The government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice, but there continued to be concerns about the treatment of some minority religious groups and certain legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government has a stated policy of monitoring "dangerous" sectarian activity through the Inter-Ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat Against Sectarian Aberrations (MIVILUDES). Discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and other groups MIVILUDES considered "dangerous sects" or "cults" remained a concern. Such groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups and acts of discrimination against these groups.

Charged by the government with observing and analyzing sectarian movements that violate the law or constitute a threat to public order, MIVILUDES coordinates the appropriate responses to abuses by sects, informs the public about potential risks, and helps victims receive aid. MIVILUDES exists as an independent body in which the Prime Minister appoints the president. Prime Minister Fillon appointed Georges Fenech as the president of MIVILUDES in 2008. Fenech is known for his opposition to Scientology and other groups. The Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP) has questioned Fenech's personal objectivity and neutrality.

The government explained in its February 2010 response to the UN Special Rapporteur's 2005 report that in addition to its traditional mandate, MIVILUDES participates in the fight against all forms of discrimination and, to that end, has had a dialogue with representatives of an organization (not named in the response) that believes it has been stigmatized, in order to find ways to address the group's concerns. MIVILUDES does not use a list of groups likely to engage in sectarian abuses. Nevertheless, the lawyer for a group representing minority religious groups in the country argued that the manner in which MIVILUDES collects and shares records on certain groups was equally problematic.

Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups. In its seventh annual report to the Prime Minister's Office published on April 7, 2010, MIVILUDES discussed the European Union's approach to sects, the threat that sectarian abuses pose to minors, and the rise in the practice of neoshamanism. The report also described efforts by the Ministry of Justice to train magistrates and penitentiary administrators in combating sectarian deviances as well as creating a regional judiciary for the protection of youth in juvenile detention facilities. According to Fenech, sectarian abuses affected 500,000 persons in France both directly and indirectly during the reporting period.

The 2001 About-Picard Law strengthened preventive and punitive measures against associations, both religious and nonreligious, that endanger the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person, place minors at mortal risk, violate another person's freedom, dignity, or identity, illegally practice medicine or pharmacology, or falsely advertise. Individuals convicted under this law face up to five years imprisonment and a 750,000 euro (approximately \$920,000) fine, while associations are subject to fines, dissolution or a definitive ban. Advocates for religious minorities have expressed the concern, among others, that provisions of this law which allow certain individuals and groups to bring claims could be abused by those seeking to advance an ideological agenda.

On October 27, 2009, a Paris correctional court found the Church of Scientology and four of its leaders guilty of fraud and fined the organization 600,000 euro (approximately \$736,000), but stopped short of banning the group's activities. The defendants had been charged under a statute targeting organized crime. Alain Rosenberg, described as the "mastermind" of the Spiritual Association of the Church of Scientology in France, was sentenced to a two-year suspended sentence and fined 30,000 euro (approximately \$36,813). The three other leaders received suspended prison sentences ranging from 18 months to two years and fines of 5,000 to 30,000 euro (approximately \$6,135) to \$36,813). The Church of Scientology appealed the ruling.

The prosecutor had initially sought to dissolve the Church of Scientology in France, but discovered during the course of the proceedings that a recent change in the law had eliminated such a penalty for the crimes charged. Parliament subsequently amended the law to make dissolution a potential penalty for defendants charged with similar offenses in the future, as well as those charged under the About-Picard law. During the debate in the senate, Secretary of State for Employment Laurent Wauquiez praised the amendment, noting a major goal in 2010 is to purge the "cancer of sects" from educational training programs.

The 2009 MIVILUDES annual report on potentially dangerous or aberrant sectarian activity referred to Jehovah's Witnesses 47 times. The report noted that government authorities remained concerned about the Jehovah's Witnesses' practices of parents refusing blood transfusions for their children and discouraging their children from pursuing higher education. The report, however, acknowledged progress on this latter point, especially in the fields of law and computer science. Some of the references to the Jehovah's Witnesses take place in the context of the report's discussion of how other countries have dealt with the issue of minors exposed to "sectarian aberrations," while many other references appeared in the context of a legal analysis of the rights of parents to impose their beliefs on their children. Scientology was not explicitly a focus of the 2009 report, although church officials expressed concern that the report's statement regarding a new focus on illegal work among certain sects could be used to unfairly target volunteers at the Church of Scientology.

On April 23, 2010, a woman in Nantes who had converted to Islam was fined 22 euro (approximately \$27) for driving while wearing a niqab, which authorities claimed hindered her vision. According to press reports, the lawyer for the driver disputed the charge, claiming that neither her vision nor freedom of movement was impaired by her clothing.

A Muslim French woman wearing a "burkini," an Islamic bathing suit which provides full body and hair coverage, was refused entry into a public pool on August 1, 2009, in compliance with public health rules, according to regional public officials. Since French public pools refuse entry for hygienic reasons to anyone wearing clothing that may be worn on the street, officials insisted that the refusal in no way related to religious values. The woman called the affair a basic case of segregation and claimed that she spoke with recreational offices to ensure there would be no problem with her swimsuit, having already swum once at the same public pool just days before the incident. Her request to file a police complaint was denied.

On July 19, 2009, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the complaint lodged against the country by families of Sikh boys was inadmissible, closing the May and December 2008 legal challenges to the law banning the wearing of ostensible religious signs in public schools filed by the United Sikhs lawyers before the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) and ECHR respectively. The United Sikhs and French Turban Action Committee had argued before the court that the boys' expulsions for wearing the "keski" (under-turban) had infringed upon 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.

By the end of the reporting period, the ECHR had not yet ruled on the 2005 application of the Jehovah's Witnesses that challenged a series of decisions by the courts that required the Jehovah's Witnesses to pay taxes on donations received

that totaled more than the value of the group's assets. The assessed tax of 57 million euro (approximately \$70 million) would consume all of the group's assets in the country and could close it. Those decisions were the first and only decisions to tax donations received by a not-for-profit corporation.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to 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.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On April 7, 2010, the Council of State ruled that the government should continue to respect a 1967 circular that authorizes civil servants to take annual leave on religious holidays that are not government holidays.

The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers reported that in February 2010 the HALDE declared that denying Jehovah's Witnesses access to a chaplain was religious discrimination. The criminal code provides that "every detainee has the right to fulfill the needs of his religious, moral, or spiritual life in prison." A public authority can only deny a prisoner the right to be visited by a chaplain of his own religion if it is necessary, legitimate, and proportionate. The HALDE stated that in this case the number of believers at a particular prison is not a criterion.

With respect to the situation in prisons, a new law was passed on November 24, 2009, which affirms that "detained persons have the right to freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion. They can practice the religion of their choice . . . without other limits than those imposed by the security needs and good order of the institution." According to the government, the number of chaplains has increased and efforts have been made to improve access to food appropriate for prisoners with religious dietary restrictions. Religious celebrations, such as Ramadan, are celebrated in prisons.

Human Rights Without Frontiers reported that on June 21, 2010, the Administrative Court of Paris issued five decisions in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses having their own chaplains in prison. In one of the cases, the director of penitentiary services had failed to respond to a request of a would-be Jehovah's Witnesses chaplain. That director has been ordered to reevaluate the request within three months or face a 100 euro (approximately \$123) fine for each day of delay. In another case an incarcerated member of Jehovah's Witnesses had requested a visit from a Jehovah's Witnesses chaplain. The court found that the state violated his right to practice his religion in prison by denying his request and ordered the government to pay 3,000 euro (approximately \$3,681) in damages. The Ministry of Justice indicated that it would appeal the decision since "there is no need for Jehovah's Witnesses to have a specific chaplain."

On November 24, 2009, the criminal court of Nanterre ruled that Deputy Mayor of Maisons-Laffitte Jacques Myard and the weekly magazine Le Point were guilty of defamation against the Christian Federation of Jehovah's Witnesses of France. Myard made remarks accusing Jehovah's Witnesses of sectarianism in an interview published on the Le Point Web site. Myard and Le Point were fined 2,000 euro (approximately \$2,454) each and ordered to pay 5,000 euro (approximately \$6,135) in damages to Jehovah's Witnesses and \$3,681 (3,000 euro) in court costs.

On September 29, 2009, the Court of Cassation affirmed the lower court finding that Pierre Brard, Deputy of Montreuil and member of the MIVILUDES, had defamed Jehovah's Witnesses when he said the group operates like an international crime ring. The court fined him one euro as symbolic damages.

In May 2010 the government announced that since 1999 and as of December 31, 2009, it had awarded 453 million euro (approximately \$556 million) through the Commission for the Compensation of Jewish Victims of Despoilment to victims despoiled of property in the country during German occupation in World War II. The commission's 2009 annual report, released in May 2010, detailed that of the 452 million euro (\$556 million) awarded, 8.8 million euro (\$10.8 million) was granted to claims filed in the United States and 11.8 million euro (\$14.5 million) to claims filed in Israel. The average value of compensation per case was 28,700 euro (\$35,217). 26,470 reports have been filed and 25,120 have been closed and of these, 17,480 were material claims (artwork, businesses, property, and furniture) and 8,990 were monetary claims. While there is no end date for the commission's activities, the report indicated that activity has been decreasing since 2007.

Senior government officials, including President Sarkozy, strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism.

On February 3, 2010, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon attended the annual dinner hosted by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions (CRIF). Fillon announced the appointment of former prefect Michel Morin as the new coordinator for the fight against racism and anti-Semitism. On January 21, 2010, during his annual New Year's meeting with senior religious figures, Sarkozy reiterated calls for peace, social cohesion, and a deepening of interreligious dialogue.

On January 25, 2010, 22 students graduated from the Catholic Institute of Paris Master's-level degree program entitled "Religion, Secularism, and Inter-Culturalism." Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum for the training program that included 30 students for the 2010 academic year. The program, which focused on imams, addressed the fact that most of the imams preaching in the country came 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, was intended to provide students, including future clerics, a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms while avoiding theology. The goal was to develop an Islam within the country that will be of the country and foster integration. Theological instruction was left to the Great Mosque of Paris, which has administered a four-year imam training program since 1993. The students are primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. The training has been well-received by the country's religious communities, including Muslims, and is open to high-level officials and clergy from all religious groups, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations.

Former president Jacques Chirac awarded the Ilan Halimi "Award for Tolerance and Fraternity" to the youth and cultural center of the southern Parisian suburb Ris-Orangis on December 2, 2009. Commemorating the February 2006 death of 23-year-old victim of anti-Semitic violence Ilan Halimi, Chirac regretted that "too much discrimination [exists in France]," which "poisons our democracy" during the ceremony at the National Assembly, adding that he believed in the equality of all cultures and religious groups. The Israeli ambassador attended the ceremony, alongside ambassadors from Arab countries.

The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor nationwide courses and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. On October 7, 2009, a national seminar was organized to train more than 250 school officials and teachers regarding discrimination prevention.

In September 2009 the Education Ministry launched new programs in junior high schools highlighting the fight against all forms of racism and intolerance as a top priority. The Ministry of Education financially supported and sponsored a program called "Coexist," an initiative of the Union of France's Jewish students in partnership with the NGOs SOS-Racism and the

Agency for Social Cohesion. A preventive program aimed at combating racism and anti-Semitism, "Coexist" strives to break down racial prejudice and stereotypes by teaching tolerance.

On June 1, 2009, in a previously unreported development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) created a Religions Bureau, the first in the country's history according to head of the bureau Joseph Maila. Maila noted that the bureau aims to educate and sensitize government officials on current religious problems outside of the country and focuses on international religious movements and their political implications for France, operating independently of the foreign minister's counselor for religious affairs at the MFA. Among other responsibilities, the bureau is expected to provide mediation and negotiation support to help resolve interethnic and interreligious conflicts.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The majority of these acts were anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize some incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

During the reporting period, there were reports of religious freedom violations between societal actors from different religious groups as well as tension within religious communities. The imam of Drancy, Hassen Chalghoumi, lodged a formal complaint on January 26, 2010, for "intentional violence and death threats" after a group of 80 unidentified persons forcibly entered his mosque on January 25, four days after he publicly supported the proposed ban on face-covering veils. Press reports say the intruders forced their way into Chalghoumi's mosque, seized his microphone, and threatened him, calling him a "disbeliever" and an "apostate" while declaring they would "liquidate...this imam of the Jews." At his request police placed Chalghoumi and his mosque under protection on January 26. According to *Le Parisien*, authorities took these threats seriously, as the imam faced similar threats in 2006 and 2009 for his openly moderate views and has earned widespread media attention and praise for his interfaith work with Christian and Jewish groups. In 2009 he launched the Conference of the Imams of France, a nationwide organization to rally moderate Muslim religious leaders.

In its 2009 annual report, the CNCDH found that racism was on the rise. The CNCDH indicated that there was an increase in anti-Semitic activity, concentrated in January 2009 following the conflict in Gaza, and an increase in threats of violence against the North African Muslim community. Racist incidents doubled in 2009 to a total of 1,026, 220 of which were violent in nature -- including 13 cases of physical abuse -- and 806 threats or acts of intimidation. The report coordinator, Marc Leyenberg, identified three factors that could have contributed to an increase in racist sentiment: rising unemployment, the government-initiated public debate on French national identity, and government consideration of proposals to prohibit face-covering veils.

According to CNCDH, there were 815 anti-Semitic acts reported in 2009, a 77.5 percent increase. The CNCDH report found a majority of these occurred during the January 2009 conflict in the Gaza Strip. CRIF President Richard Prasquier reported a similar increase in incidents and explanation for it. These acts involved 172 violent anti-Semitic acts (compared to 100 in 2008), of which 78 were acts of physical assault, 79 of damage to personal property, 30 of synagogue vandalism, and 11 of cemetery or memorial vandalism. Of the 172 violent anti-Semitic incidents, 20 were committed by assailants of Arab-Muslim origin and 14 by members of extreme right movements and gangs. Additionally, there were numerous reports of anti-Semitic slurs and the misuse of the word "Jew" as an insult, which Jews and others found offensive and hurtful.

The Jewish Community Protection Service (SPCJ) reported a 70 percent reduction in anti-Semitic incidents during the first quarter of 2010. The SPCJ, Anti-Defamation League, and French NGO National Center for Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism (BNCVA), however, each reported an increase in anti-Semitic acts following the May 31, 2010 Gaza flotilla incident. A CRIF representative expressed satisfaction with the government's response in the wake of the flotilla incident,

noting that places of worship were secured, police cordons prevented protests from turning violent, and local officials remained in contact with Jewish community leaders.

According to the CNCDH report, approximately a third of racial complaints were reported by the North African community, with 240 threats, 44 of which were specifically related to "Islamophobia." Six mosques were targeted in attacks in 2009, compared to two in 2008. Members of the Arab-Muslim community also experienced instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism during the reporting period.

Two assailants attacked David Pariente, a 42-year-old Jewish man wearing a yarmulke, with a knife and an iron rod in Strasbourg on April 30, 2010, according to media reports. Hospitalized with serious injuries, Pariente was struck in the back and injured in the chest by his attackers. Police immediately apprehended the two suspects, releasing an individual identified as a witness in the attack while charging the assailant, a 38-year old Algerian national, with "attempted aggravated murder" on May 2, 2010. The magistrate presiding over the case acknowledged the anti-Semitic nature of the incident, as the mentally disturbed assailant confessed to authorities that he attacked the victim only because he was wearing a yarmulke. The violent nature of the anti-Semitic attack generated outrage and public condemnation from across the political and religious spectrum, with Interior Minister Hortefeux expressing his "solidarity" and "support" for the Jewish community.

The alleged murder of a Muslim man by Jewish assailants has raised accusations of media bias due to the minimal press coverage it received. On March 31, 2010, 35-year old Said Bourarach was found dead in a canal in the Paris suburb of Bobigny, after he was attacked by five assailants in front of the store where he worked as a security guard. According to eyewitness accounts, a violent dispute broke out between the French victim of Moroccan origin, and five men later identified as Jewish, when Bourarach refused to allow them entry into the store after closing time. On April 16, 2010, a memorial was held for the victim at the Epinay-sur-Seine mosque, during which the local imam denounced the lack of media coverage and absence of political condemnation of the perceived racially motivated killing. To date, four men between the ages of 19 and 25 have been investigated for their involvement in the case, with three placed in preventative detention for first-degree murder. Bobigny's chief prosecutor in the case, Sylvie Moisson, underscored on April 2, 2010, that neither the race nor the religion of the victim or the accused would affect the investigation.

After a two-month trial behind closed doors, sentences were handed down on July 10, 2009, for Youssouf Fofana and other members of the self-styled "Gang of Barbarians" accused of the brutal torture-murder of Ilan Halimi, a 23-year-old Jewish man. Fofana, the self-proclaimed leader of the gang who admitted to having inflicted the fatal blows and to having set fire to Halimi's body after his kidnapping, was sentenced to life in prison (and not eligible for parole for 22 years), which is rare in the country, while his two primary accomplices received 15- and 18-year sentences. For the 26 other accomplices, sentences ranged from six months deferred to 18 years, with two acquittals. Francis Szpiner, the Halimi family's attorney, called for a new trial of several of Fofana's accomplices and asked that Justice Minister Michele Alliot-Marie appeal their sentences. The BNVCA echoed Szpiner's appeal to Alliot-Marie, denounced the accomplices' sentences as too "lenient," and said the trial's outcome would "trivialize" anti-Semitism. The BNVCA and the United Jewish Social Fund organized a demonstration on July 13, 2009, in front of the Ministry of Justice.

Jehovah's Witnesses' officials noted that in 2009 seven adherents were physically attacked.

On June 7, 2010, a man of North African origin walked up the aisle of a train, shouting, "Are you a Jew?" and punched a man whom he took for a Jew; the assailant shouted "Did you see what your cousins did in Gaza?" The victim was hospitalized for injuries sustained during the attack.

On June 6, 2010, in Nice, a Chabad rabbi was insulted on the street by unidentified assailants who threw rocks at him, injuring his leg.

On May 2, 2010, a 78-year-old Jewish man in Nimes was attacked with tear gas in front of the local synagogue, which was then vandalized with anti-Semitic slurs, according to press reports. Police were investigating complaints lodged by the victim and the synagogue and reviewing surveillance footage to identify the assailants as of the end of the reporting period.

According to newspaper reports, in May 2010 a 60-year-old female, in the company of her daughter, took issue with a 26-year-old Muslim woman who was wearing a burqa in a clothing shop in the town of Trignac. The older woman reportedly likened the younger woman to Belphegor, a horror demon character portrayed on television that covers his hideous face with a mask. At some point during an argument between the two women, a scuffle ensued and the Muslim woman reportedly lost her veil. Press reports differed as to whether the older woman removed it during the altercation. Gendarmes questioned the three women, and the local prosecutor has decided to bring proceedings against the older woman and her daughter for "insult and violence."

During the reporting period, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 85 acts of vandalism against places of worship in the country, including Molotov cocktails and firearms directed at Jehovah's Witnesses' property.

On June 7, 2010, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a Jewish nursing home in Metz, but no damage was reported.

According to press reports, demonstrators threw rocks and smashed windows of the Jewish Chabad school of Grenoble Saint Lazare Carnot on May 31, 2010. The building was unoccupied at the time. According to the BNVCA, unidentified individuals broke into the home of the BNVCA president and burned his vehicle on May 28, 2010.

On April 26, 2010, at least 20 shots were fired at the premises of a halal butcher on the Rue de Lyon in Marseille's 15th arrondissement, a largely Muslim quarter of the city. Newspaper accounts indicated that the shooting, which broke the protective shutters and the front windows, was reportedly carried out with an automatic rifle. No one was injured in this attack.

On April 25, 2010, the Arrahma Mosque in Istres was the target of a fusillade of more than 30 bullets. The mosque was empty at the time of the gunfire and no one was injured in the attack. The mosque, which was dedicated by the mayor of Istres in 2007, serves as a daily prayer center for approximately 50 Muslim worshipers in the city. Mayor Francois Bernardini condemned the attack and emphasized that this was not typical of the attitude of his fellow citizens. Mosque attendees in Istres were quoted as saying that there have been no previous threats to them or their mosque and that they have had a peaceful relationship in the community. Police began an investigation, noting that at least two firearms were used.

On February 17, 2010, vandals drew racist graffiti and swastikas on the Mosque of Sorgues in southeastern France, according to police officials and CFCM. Local branches of the Socialists, Ecologists, and small center-left parties condemned the desecration. In a telephone interview, Thierry Lagneau, UMP leader in the Vaucluse department, said he "obviously" denounced the incident, but he also decried its "politicization." UMP Senator and Mayor of Sorgues Alain Milon did not release a statement. MRAP and the Movement for Living Together (Mixite) stated that they intend to lodge a formal complaint. They organized a silent march in Avignon on February 20, 2010, designed to express their solidarity against such acts of vandalism and desecration. The protest march attracted a limited number of participants.

Mosques suffered similar desecrations and acts of vandalism in Obernai in the Bas-Rhin region on February 13, 2010, Sainte Etienne in the Loire on February 8, Crepy-en-Valois in Oise on January 31, and Strasbourg on January 12. CFCM President Moussaoui said the series of desecrations made clear that the vandal's true objective was to undermine national unity. He repeated CFCM's longstanding call for a parliamentary fact-finding mission to investigate Islamophobia in the country.

On January 27, 2010, 30 graves in a Jewish cemetery in Strasbourg were desecrated with swastikas on the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, sparking outrage from government officials and antiracism groups. In a statement released on the same day, President Sarkozy denounced the act as "intolerable" and a demonstration of the "the hideous face of racism." Interior Minister Hortefeux pledged "an absolute determination" to punish those responsible for the vandalism.

On January 17, 2010, unidentified vandals scrawled a two-meter wide swastika on the wall of a mosque in Beziers, prompting a local Muslim association to lodge a complaint. Local officials, including the UMP mayor of Beziers, Raymond Couderc, and CRIF, strongly condemned the act.

On the night of December 12, 2009, unknown assailants scrawled a Nazi slogan, swastikas, and hung pigs' feet on the entrance of the local mosque in Castres, a large town near Toulouse in the Southwest. The slogans included "White Power," "Sieg Heil," and " France for French people." National and local politicians immediately denounced the incident, including Interior Minister Hortefeux, who called it a "vile and racist desecration." The president of the mosque, Abdelmalek Bouregba, and other Muslim leaders claimed the attack was linked to the current debate on national identity and the earlier vote in Switzerland to ban the construction of new minarets, which resonated in the country. The Castres mosque serves the area's estimated 350 Muslims.

In September 2009 a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the Jewish ORT Bramson High School in Marseille, according to press reports. Although no one was injured, a fence and vehicles were damaged.

On October 27, 2009, a Paris court ordered far-right comedian Dieudonne M'Bala M'Bala to pay 20,000 euro (\$24,542) for an anti-Semitic stunt during a December 2008 stage show in which he invited notorious Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson on stage to receive a satirical award. The 43-year old French standup comedian was fined 10,000 euro (\$12,271) for his "public anti-Semitic insults" and 10,000 euro (\$12,271) in damages and legal fees to organizations that sued him for anti-Semitism. While M'Bala M'Bala defended his right to free expression, antiracism and Jewish defense organizations welcomed the verdict.

The Paris Prefecture prohibited a controversial street party scheduled for Friday, June 18, 2010, which organizers had promoted as an "anti-Islamization" event in a heavily North African and sub-Saharan African neighborhood of Paris. The prefecture determined that allowing the event to go forward would have caused a serious risk to public order. Promoters of the "Pork Sausage and Wine" event, which was organized through a Facebook page that claimed to have approximately 7,000 members, said they intended to challenge the growing influence of Islam in their neighborhood. Islam forbids the consumption of pork and alcohol, and the event was scheduled to begin immediately after Friday prayers where Muslims often pray in the street since the local mosque does not have sufficient space. In view of the cancellation, an estimated 800 supporters of the event instead gathered on June 18 at Place de l'Etoile. The protestors came from a variety of groups, including Bloc Identitaire, which promotes the defense of France's white identity, as well as marginal feminist and secularist groups.

The Church of Scientology continued to report instances of societal discrimination during the reporting period, including the difficulty some members had obtaining bank accounts. Church officials noted, however, that the French National Bank often reversed the decisions of local banks that refused accounts to church members, even if the accounts ultimately granted were quite limited in their features. Church officials also reported positive relations with local police and officials at the Ministry of Interior.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Islamic headscarves, exacerbated by the debate on the wearing of burqas in the country, 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.

On January 7, 2010, the government deported a "radical" imam to Egypt for reportedly inciting his followers to rise up against the West, according to press reports. The law authorizes the expulsion of aliens for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons." Interior Minister Hortefeux stated that government authorities had been following the increasingly "dangerous" preaching of Ali Ibrahim el-Soudany since 2008. Hortefeux emphasized that "the preachers of hate, who have nothing to do with religious freedom, have no place in French territory." El-Soudany is the 29th Islamic preacher and the 129th Islamic radical deported since 2001. Reportedly, El-Soudany had lived in the country for several years, but without legal residence.

From January to October 2009, the Interior Ministry registered 1,157 racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, or discriminatory messages on the Internet. Among the received messages, 238 were discriminatory or xenophobic; 822 provoked racial, ethnic, or religious hatred; 60 defended crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; and 30 denied crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust. On January 21, 2010, the government produced a report on how to combat this type of activity, calling for the implementation of a collective action plan at the national and local levels to mobilize public authorities, Internet operators, and special-interest groups. At the annual CRIF dinner on February 3, 2010, Prime Minister Fillon announced that the government would oversee implementation of the report's proposals.

Several NGOs initiated court challenges to the National Front party's election campaign poster. The poster depicted a woman dressed in a burqa, the Algerian flag with minarets rising out of it, and the words "No to Islamism" and "the Youth with Le Pen." On March 12, a Marseille court ruled in favor of the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism and ordered that the posters be removed. The court found that the poster was of a nature to provoke animosity against certain groups based on their religious affiliation, gender, and nationality.

The government made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. The government combated racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim acts 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 other forms of violence. The government regularly prosecuted anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and other similar crimes. Prosecutors were ordered to seek maximum punishments for hate crimes and to appeal systematically sentences not considered strong enough.

On June 17, 2010, Interior Minister Hortefeux and Mohammed Moussaoui, president of CFCM, signed a convention to implement a daily tallying and assessment of anti-Muslim acts. The convention foresaw quarterly meetings of personnel from both the Interior Ministry and CFCM to crosscheck statistics.

More than 180 dedicated antidiscrimination posts operated in district courts staffed by a referring judge charged with managing local cases in close collaboration with civil society. Despite the important partnerships forged by the antidiscrimination posts, the CNCDH reported that prosecutors blamed the relatively low number of complaints filed for discriminatory acts on a lack of reporting by institutional interlocutors, stressing the need to adopt methods to better identify cases of discrimination.

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim 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.

Marking the second national conference of imams in the country, the Rally of Muslims in France (RMF) organized a symposium on June 5-6, 2010, on "Being an Imam in France Today -- Responsibilities and Challenges." In addition to more than 200 imams trained in the country, the conference brought together imams posted to the country by the Moroccan Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs, members of the European Council of Ulema in Morocco, and representatives of RMF in the region. According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 600 imams in the country as of the end of the reporting period.

On May 31, 2010, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, founder of the Jewish-Muslim Association of France (AJMF), launched his scheduled sixth bus tour of the country's most turbulent and divided neighborhoods. According to AJMF director Elia Ktourza, Rabbi Serfaty and his Muslim and Jewish guests promote interfaith tolerance by engaging passersby in Muslim, Jewish, and mixed neighborhoods in conversation about tolerance, respect, and mutual appreciation. Serfaty, who is a French national of Tunisian origin, decided to engage in this work after he suffered an anti-Semitic attack.

Rabbi Serfaty continued to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim officials and religious counterparts and by sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for Muslim students. Between April 25 and April 28, 2010, Rabbi Serfaty led a group of 15 French imams largely drawn from Paris and its suburbs on a tour of the former Nazi concentration camps in Poland. The imams were deeply moved, according to AJMF director Ktourza, daughter of Rabbi Serfaty, who stated that they "expressed their emotions and their gratitude for having been able to participate in the trip."

With the parliamentary debate over outlawing face-covering veils in the background, Muslim leaders decried a "tense" atmosphere characterized by concerns about "Islamophobia" at a conference held outside Paris from April 2 to 5, 2010. The number of participants in the 27th Annual Congress of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF), which has reportedly evolved into the single largest gathering for Muslims in Europe, may have reached as high as 30,000 in 2010. At the conference UOIF President Fouad Alaoui denounced what he described as "a raging climate of Islamophobia" in France, while also noting the failure of the Muslim community to demonstrate its real values and "the true face of Islam."

The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, consists of 22 churches and 84 associations, and serves as the Protestant community's interlocutor with the government. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant 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 CFCM organized a conference of more than 700 participants on "validating our citizenship" in Beziers on January 24, 2010. During the conference, participants declared that it was time for the Muslim community to "raise their heads up" and take their rightful place as full citizens. The Languedoc-Roussillon region, where Beziers is located, is home to an estimated 250,000 Muslims.

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 served as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches.

There was 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. The embassy actively promotes religious interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups, particularly focusing on relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Engagement was often conducted in collaboration with U.S. consulates and American presence posts.

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. Embassy officials hosted visits from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the CRIF, the European Jewish Congress, 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 (evening meal during Ramadan) with a focus on young Muslim leaders. Washington-based State Department representatives also traveled to France 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 NGOs that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment and actions, such as SOS Racisme. The embassy awarded a 7,577 euro (\$9,000) grant to the AJMF, led by Rabbi Serfaty, the country's most famous interfaith leader. The grant supported Serfaty's July to September 2010 "Friendship Tour," during which the rabbi traveled with an imam to impoverished and religiously diverse neighborhoods throughout the country to discuss the common values and interests of Jews and Muslims. Serfaty's AJMF organization, and his outreach tour (the sixth of its kind), reached more than 150 communities and associations through more than 300 events, including the tour, exhibitions, presentations, training seminars, a virtual documentation center, a mosque-synagogue twinning event, and a Web site. In May and June 2010, Serfaty went on a bus tour of the country's most religiously divided neighborhoods. The Muslim and Jewish guests on the bus spent the tour discussing tolerance and respect with passersby and visiting local schools, NGOs, elected officials, police officers, and social service providers.

American Presence Post (APP) Bordeaux participated in the annual Jewish-Muslim friendship meeting, while APP Lyon focuses its engagement on the local Muslim community, attempting to curb the formation of religious extremism and intolerance beginning with the city's youth and continuing through to religious leaders.

On June 8, 2010, the embassy cosponsored an interfaith symposium with the Center for International Education Exchange which brought together American and French interfaith organizers and scholars to discuss best practices for interfaith dialogue and action. American community organizer Rami Nashashibi, Director General of the Inner City Muslim Action Network of Chicago, spoke and shared his experiences. More than 50 guests explored anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim, and xenophobia sentiments in the country and the United States.

The embassy supported an Open Mosque and Open Synagogue exchange event November 13-15, 2009. This weekend initiative opened the two largest Jewish and Muslim centers of worship in Paris to each other, deliberately bringing together members of both religious groups in dialogue and exchange. Embassy Paris funded the American group, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which had initiated this event (after having done similar exchanges in the United States), to travel to the country in order to observe and participate in the event.

During the reporting period, the embassy's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), in part due to special programs related to minority communities, included imams and other minority community leaders from throughout the country. Following a seminar held in Paris from June 4 to 11, 2009, on "Religious Diversity in Everyday Life in France"

which focused on the role of chaplains in prisons, hospitals, the military, and with youth, the IVLP program organized an exchange for French experts on the subject in the United States from October 11 to 17, 2009. This trip led to an exchange of ideas and information about incarceration in both countries and led directly to the creation of a training course at Paris/Nanterre for prison pastors.

The embassy partnered with the country's leaders in a range of sectors to share best practices for managing diversity and promoting effective models to allow individuals with different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to live harmoniously. For example, the Cultural Attaché hosted Muslim Affairs Council Executive Director Salam al-Marayati for a round-table discussion entitled "At the crossroads of freedom of religion and freedom of speech." Guests exchanged views on the different approaches of the country and the United States with respect to these issues.

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