

FRANCE 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. Some laws and policies, however, restrict religious expression in public and others provide for monitoring of minority religious groups.

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. The majority of the abusive or discriminatory acts were anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim. In March Islamist extremist Mohamed Merah murdered three soldiers, one of whom was Muslim, and a Jewish teacher and three Jewish children. The country is home to some of Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities and its second largest population of Roman Catholics.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government, and the embassy actively promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups, particularly focusing on relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Representatives from the embassy met with government officials, private citizens, religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved with religious freedom. They also met with senior representatives from the major religious groups. The embassy conducted public affairs outreach programs to minority religious groups throughout the country and hosted an annual iftar. Engagement was often conducted in collaboration with U.S. consulates and American presence posts.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 64 million, according to the 2010 national census conducted by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). The government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to a poll published in *Le Parisien* in 2011, 36 percent of the population believes in God, 34 percent does not, and 30 percent is uncertain.

The Catholic daily *La Croix* found that 64 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic, 6 percent of whom classify themselves as observant. The

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Interior Ministry estimates that 8 to 10 percent of the population is Muslim, 25 percent of whom attend Friday prayers. The Muslim population primarily consists of immigrants from former French North African and sub-Saharan colonies and their descendants.

All other religious groups combined constitute less than 7 percent of the population. *Le Parisien* estimates that there are 1.6 million Protestants, 500,000 of whom are evangelical. Many evangelical churches are African-style “prosperity” churches composed primarily of African and Antillean immigrants. The *Buddhist Union* estimates there are one million Buddhist sympathizers and practitioners. The Buddhist population mainly consists of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000, of whom 40 percent are highly observant, according to press reports. The Jewish community is comprised of approximately 70 percent Sephardic and 30 percent Ashkenazi Jews. The Jehovah’s Witnesses estimate they have approximately 120,000 members. Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; most are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox churches. The Church of Scientology estimates 50,000 members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimates its membership at 36,000 in metropolitan France and 22,000 in French overseas departments and territories, 30 percent of whom are observant. According to the press, there are between 7,000 and 15,000 Sikhs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public, and others provide for monitoring of minority religious group activities.

The constitution and laws, as well as international and European covenants with the force of law, 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.” 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 any law they allege impedes their religious freedom.

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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 perpetrators of “hate” crimes face increased punishments. For certain crimes, the penalties are increased when the offense is committed because of the victim’s actual or perceived membership or non-membership in 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.

Although not legally required, religious groups 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 normally are 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 perform religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school through their cultural association.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and receive tax-exempt status. In order 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. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. However, if the prefecture determines that an association is not in conformity with the law, the government may change the association’s status and require it to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on future and past donations.

According to the Interior Ministry, approximately 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah’s Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status.

According to the 1905 law separating church and state, the government does not directly finance religious groups to build new mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. It also exempts places of worship from property

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taxes. In addition, the government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

There are three French territories in which the 1905 law does not apply. Because Alsace-Lorraine was part of the German Empire during the passage of the 1905 law, members of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments may also provide financial support for building religious edifices. French Guyana, which is governed under the colonial laws of Charles X (1824-1830), may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. The French Overseas Departments and Territories, which include island territories in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian oceans, and several peri-Antarctic islands as well as a claim in Antarctica, are also not subject to the 1905 law and may provide funding for religious groups within their territories.

A law approved in 2010 prohibits covering one's face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces such as restaurants and movie theaters. The policy of the police is not to enforce the law in private locations, or around places of worship, where the law's application would unduly interfere with the free exercise of religion. If the police encounter someone in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. Police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. However, an individual may not be questioned or held for more than four hours. Refusal to remove the face-covering garment after being instructed to do so by a police official carries a fine of 150 euros (\$200) or attendance at a citizenship course.

Additionally, those who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender, by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority, are subject to a fine of 30,000 euros (\$40,000) and could receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the victim is a minor.

The government charges the Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and to Combat Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) with observing and analyzing minority religious groups that have been labeled as sects for activities that violate the law or constitute a threat to public order. It coordinates the appropriate responses to abuses by such groups, informs the public about potential risks, and helps victims receive aid. MIVILUDES publishes an annual report as well as several guides intended to identify and protect citizens from what it labels sectarian abuses. Some

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groups expressed concern in previous years that these publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups. On August 2, Prime Minister Ayrault appointed Serge Blisko as president of the MIVILUDES.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Religious instruction is not provided in public schools, except in the three territories previously mentioned. However, facts about religious groups are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear religious symbols or to be given religious instruction in school may homeschool or send their children to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

The government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. According to Ministry of Education data from the 2011-2012 school year, nearly 14 percent, or about 9,300 schools in France are private; 17 percent of French students (2,084,400) are enrolled in private institutions. Of the private schools, 97 percent are Catholic; the remaining private schools are Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, or not religiously affiliated. There are 2 million students attending approximately 9,000 Catholic primary schools, and 30,500 Jewish students attending approximately 300 Jewish primary schools. There are also small numbers of students attending four Protestant primary schools and four Muslim middle schools. Ninety eight percent of private schools are under contract with the government.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before traveling 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 group to apply with the local prefecture for a temporary residence card.

The law establishes preventive and punitive measures against associations, both religious and nonreligious, found to 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 (\$979,226) fine, while associations are subject to

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fines, dissolution, or a definitive ban. Advocates for minority religious groups are concerned that provisions of this law allowing certain individuals and groups to bring claims could be abused by those seeking to advance an ideological agenda.

The law 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 prison chaplains has increased since 2008 and efforts are made to improve access to food appropriate for prisoners with religious dietary restrictions. Religious celebrations, such as Ramadan, are observed in prisons. As of January 1, according to the French Ministry of Justice, there are 655 Catholic, 317 Protestant, 151 Muslim, 70 Jewish, 24 Orthodox, and 32 “other” chaplains employed by the penitentiary system. On October 11, the Justice Minister announced that 15 full-time Muslim chaplains will be hired to work in French prisons in 2013. Detainees may receive visitors if they are family members, close friends, chaplains, or authorized volunteers. In the general visiting area, any visitor can bring objects of worship to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues, but may not pray. However, prisoners may pray individually in their cells, with the chaplain in the designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments in which they can receive family for up to 48 hours.

The government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

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

Government Practices

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government continued to enforce the legal prohibition on wearing face-covering garments in public.

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 and Muslim communities, the Protestant Federation, and the Catholic Conference of Bishops, publicly condemned racist and other forms of violence.

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The government regularly investigated and prosecuted criminal behavior directed at religious groups, including 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 adequate.

The 2010 law prohibiting covering one's face in public places was put in place to address security concerns about being unable to identify an individual whose face was covered, but it was widely recognized that it was intended to prohibit Muslim women from wearing the burqa or niqab. From April 2011, when the ban on covering one's face in public went into effect, to April 2012, police stopped and questioned 354 women, convicting and fining 302. The law, although initially controversial, had the support of all major political parties and most major religious groups.

In November a public daycare center in Limoges fired a female employee for "serious misconduct" because she refused to remove her hijab at work. She had been informed during her interview that she would not be allowed to wear the face-covering veil in the workplace and had reportedly agreed with the restriction.

On February 2, the Paris appeals court upheld fraud charges from a 2009 case against the Church of Scientology, which the church had appealed. Under a statute targeting organized crime, the appeals court said the church pressured members to pay tens of thousands of euros for personality tests, vitamin cures, sauna sessions and "purification packs." Five church leaders were each fined from 10,000 to 30,000 euros (\$13,056 to \$39,169) and four received suspended jail sentences of up to two years. The group announced it would appeal the decision to the Court of Cassation and bring a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). At year's end, no date had been set for the appeal.

On February 21, the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship organization, in partnership with the city of Paris, held its annual gala at the Paris city hall. Major figures from the political, religious, and civil society spheres attended to emphasize dialogue and understanding between the two religious groups.

On February 28, the then-foreign minister published an article in the Catholic daily *La Croix* underlining the country's commitment to protecting Arab Christians. The government continued its efforts to extradite from Canada Hassan Diab, the prime suspect in a 1980 terrorist attack on a Paris synagogue that killed four people. After appealing the original 2011 extradition ruling, Diab also appealed an

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April 4 order signed by the Canadian justice minister approving the extradition. At year's end, Diab remained in Canada.

On May 21, Interior Minister Manuel Valls attended the annual dinner hosted by the Marseille branch of the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France* (CRIF), France's largest Jewish umbrella organization. In his speech, Valls strongly criticized radicals who preach hatred of Jews. Valls also expressed solidarity with the Jewish community, saying that "when Jews are attacked, the entire French Republic is under attack." On June 4, Minister Valls announced the government would increase protection of Jewish neighborhoods, including Jewish schools and places of worship.

On July 22, the 70th anniversary of the Vel'd'Hiv roundup, President Hollande acknowledged the country's responsibility in rounding up 13,152 Jews in Paris and its suburbs on July 16-17, 1942, for deportation to Nazi camps. Hollande also stressed the importance of memorializing and teaching about the Holocaust in schools. A July 20 statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stressed the importance of remembrance programs.

At the September 10 inauguration of the "Camp des Milles" Memorial on the site of a World War II Jewish internment and deportation camp, the prime minister announced a government action plan to combat anti-Semitism and racism. The prime minister stressed that fighting racism and anti-Semitism was a priority for the government, and noted that the action plan focused on fighting long-engrained prejudices against foreigners and "the others" through education.

The state-owned railway company SNCF supported remembrance activities and memorials for 20th century genocides.

On October 31, the government expelled Tunisian imam Mohamed Hammami after accusing him of anti-Semitism, inciting his followers to "violent jihad," and justifying the use of violence and corporal punishment against women.

During a joint November 1 ceremony with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Jewish school in Toulouse where an Islamist militant killed three children and a teacher on March 19, President Hollande said the country would protect Jewish school children and fight to stamp out anti-Semitism.

On December 11, the government returned 6,373,987 euros (\$8,438,521) in taxes to the Jehovah Witnesses after the ECHR ruled on July 5 that the government had

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violated article 9 of the European Convention on Religious Freedom. The government had retroactively levied a 60 percent tax on religious donations made by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The ECHR ruled that the application of Article 757 of the tax code was not sufficiently precise or predictable.

The Interior Ministry continued to provide 60 percent of the funding for a program at the Catholic Institute of Paris entitled "Religion, Secularism, and Interculturalism" for 30 students for an academic year. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum. Although the program was open to persons of all faiths, Muslims expressed the greatest interest in it. Consequently, the program sought to address the fact that most imams came from overseas and did not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations and their understanding of local customs and laws. Initiated in collaboration with the Great Mosque of Paris, the program provided students, including future clerics, a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms while avoiding theology. The goal of this portion of the program was to develop an "Islam within France" and foster integration. Theological instruction was left to the Great Mosque of Paris, which continued to administer a four-year imam training program begun in 1993. The students were primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. The training was well-received by the country's religious communities, including Muslims, and was open to high-level officials and clergy from all religious groups, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations.

The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor nationwide courses and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. It partnered with the League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) to educate students about anti-Semitism and racism. LICRA provided educational tools, worked directly in schools, and organized trips to educate students about racism.

The government made efforts to demonstrate respect for Muslims, encouraged inter-religious dialogue, and stressed the importance of having more French imams and chaplains and greater control over foreign financing of mosques. On February 6, the country's first Muslim public cemetery was inaugurated in Strasbourg. The city spent 800,000 euros (\$1,044,507) for the cemetery, which faces Mecca and can accommodate 1,000 graves. While open to members of all religious groups, it was expected to be used primarily by Muslims.

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On July 6, Interior Minister Manuel Valls attended the opening of a mosque in the Paris suburb of Cergy, and reiterated the government's commitment to fighting anti-Muslim acts. On September 27, Valls attended and spoke at the inauguration of the Strasbourg Grand Mosque, where he encouraged Muslim leaders to "pass the baton to the next generation of French Muslims" who had fewer ties to their parent's country of origin. The Strasbourg local and regional governments funded 26 percent of the 8.5 million euro (\$11 million) cost of the mosque.

Members of some minority religious groups such as Scientologists expressed concern that government policies contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups and acts of discrimination. Following a February appellate court decision upholding the fraud conviction of the two main Scientology bodies in the country, a Scientologist press release called the ruling biased and unfair. Dozens of Scientologists protested what they considered discrimination in front of the courthouse, and the organization filed an appeal to the country's highest court, the Cour de Cassation.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The majority of these acts were anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim. However, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

On March 11 and 15, an Islamist extremist, Mohamed Merah, killed three French soldiers, one of whom was Muslim, and critically injured another Muslim soldier, in Montauban and Toulouse. On March 19, Merah killed a Jewish teacher and three Jewish children at the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse. Police killed Merah on March 22, after a 32-hour siege at his apartment. The government and all major religious leaders condemned Merah's attack at the school and its anti-Semitic nature.

Members of the Arab Muslim community experienced instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism during the year. For the period of January 1 to December 31, the French Council of the Muslim Faith reported 201 anti-Muslim acts (53 acts and 143 threats) compared to 155 in 2011, a 28 percent increase.

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On April 9, a bomb partially destroyed a Muslim prayer room in Ajaccio, Corsica, and racist slogans were found on a wall of the damaged building. The investigation was still underway at year's end.

In May two men claiming to belong to the extreme right attacked two 70-year-old Muslims on their way to mosque to attend prayers in Amiens. The men were admitted to Amiens hospital with injuries to their legs and ribs. The victims filed lawsuits and the Amiens prosecutor launched an investigation.

On July 6, the French Football Federation (FFF) denounced a decision by the International Football Association Board (FIFA) to allow French women football players to wear the hijab during matches, beginning in October. The FFF did not permit female French players to wear headscarves while playing in France, although this restriction did not apply to visiting foreign players.

On August 2, during Ramadan, two pigs' heads were discovered on the doorsteps of a mosque in Montauban. A significant amount of pig blood had also been thrown at the door of the mosque. Interior Minister Valls and the mayor of Montauban denounced the attack and pledged to prosecute the perpetrators. The police investigation was ongoing at year's end.

On September 19, French weekly *Charlie Hebdo* published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, inflaming tensions across the country. The Syrian Association for Liberty filed a lawsuit claiming the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons constituted hate speech. There were no reports of further legal action by year's end.

On October 20, approximately 70 members of the far-right nationalist group "Generation Identitaire" (Generation of Identities) occupied the projected site of the grand mosque of Poitiers and demanded a referendum on immigration and the construction of mosques. Four protesters were indicted for "inciting hatred."

On October 25, a poll conducted by Institut Francais d'Opinion Publique (IFOP) found that a decline in the image of Islam in the country over the past two years. According to the poll, 43 percent of respondents saw the presence of the Muslim community as a threat to French identity, while 17 percent indicated it enriched French culture. The poll also found growing opposition to Islam's more visible symbols; 43 percent of respondents opposed the construction of mosques, and 63 percent opposed wearing a veil. Sixty percent of respondents considered Islam "too visible" in the country, and 68 percent agreed that French Muslims were not well integrated into society because of their own reluctance to integrate.

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On April 24, Amnesty International released its report “Choice and Prejudice: Discrimination against Muslims in Europe,” in which it claimed that French businesses did not properly implement legislation prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. The report claimed that employers often banned religious and cultural symbols on the grounds that some clients or colleagues might find them unpleasant and that they were incompatible with company’s image of neutrality.

The Jewish Community Protection Service reported a 58 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents during the year compared with 2011. The Ministry of Interior reported 310 anti-Semitic acts for the period of January to June, compared to 226 anti-Semitic acts for the same months in 2011.

In January the authorities granted conditional release from prison to a woman of Iranian descent who was sentenced in 2009 and 2010 to nine years in prison for her part in the 2006 murder of Ilan Halimi, a 23-year-old Jewish man. The woman, a minor at the time of the crime, had lured Halimi to a house where he was tortured and killed by waiting assailants.

On March 24, assailants desecrated over 30 Jewish graves in Nice. They tore Stars of David off the tombstones and stole candle lamps.

On June 2, assailants carrying hammers and iron bars attacked three Jewish teenagers in the Lyon suburb of Villeurbanne. The attack took place as the three victims, each wearing a yarmulke, left a Jewish school. On June 6, police announced the arrest of two suspects in connection with the attack. A trial date had not been set by year’s end.

On September 19, a small package bomb exploded in a kosher grocery store in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles, causing minor damage and injuring one. An investigation into the attack led to dismantling an alleged Islamist cell across the country on October 6. On October 11, seven people were placed under formal investigation for association with a terrorist group.

On October 15, anti-racist and Jewish organizations condemned the creation of a micro-blogging site by a user with the hashtag #unbonjuif (“a good Jew”). The hashtag, whose purpose was to spread anti-Semitic jokes, was the third most popular tagged subject in the country within a week of its creation. The justice minister issued an October 17 statement reaffirming that racist and anti-Semitic

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Internet posts were punishable by law. The Union of Jewish students forced Twitter to remove the posts after threatening legal action.

According to the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) report, approximately a third of complaints of racism were reported by the North African community, with 695 racist and xenophobic threats, 117 of which were specifically related to anti-Islam bias, compared to 94 in 2010.

The Ministry of Interior reported a 5 percent increase in anti-Catholic incidents during the year compared with 2011. Between January and August, the Ministry reported that 233 churches and chapels were vandalized, and 135 cemeteries were desecrated.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials noted that 17 members were physically attacked in 2011, the most recent year for which data were available. As of December 1, 2011, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 50 acts of vandalism on places of worship, most notably five firearm attacks and one use of a Molotov cocktail.

On September 16, the Christian Assembly Church in Toulouse was attacked with Molotov cocktails. The windows of the church were shattered and the building sustained moderate fire damage. An investigation was ongoing at year's end.

On March 25, more than ten thousand participants took part in interfaith marches around France to commemorate the victims of the seven murders committed by Mohamed Merah earlier that month.

Between November 9 and 11, a series of interfaith dialogues took place between the Jewish and Muslim communities across the country. Jews and Muslims, along with government and community leaders, gathered in 30 different places of worship to discuss belief systems, recent government actions, and religious activities in an effort to facilitate communication and understanding between the two groups.

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.

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The Council of Christian Churches, composed of three seven-member delegations representing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches, served as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. A three-member delegation represented the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represented the Anglican Communion on the council.

An organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish communities addressed and issued statements on various national and international themes. The Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, through its National Service for Relations with Islam, organized an annual training session on Islam to maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations.

The Documentation Center for Secularism and Religions sought to increase awareness of different religions. It published a calendar of all religious holidays and explained the origins and traditions associated with the holidays.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government, and the embassy actively promoted 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 (APPs).

Embassy representatives met with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters to discuss religious freedom and tolerance, including the increase in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim actions during the year. Embassy officers also met regularly with private citizens, religious groups, and NGOs involved with religious freedom. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with senior representatives from the major religious groups, and hosted visits from the CRIF and Catholic priests working on interfaith dialogue. The embassy also conducted regular outreach to Muslim communities throughout the country. Washington-based Department of State representatives traveled to the country to conduct outreach activities.

The embassy conducted outreach programs to minority communities throughout the country. The embassy also supported NGO projects, such as SOS-Racisme, to promote tolerance and fight anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment and actions.

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The consuls general in Strasbourg and Marseille participated in outreach events to Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Consulate Marseille sponsored the interfaith dialogue Esperance. APP Bordeaux hosted an iftar for representatives of the city's major religions. APP Lyon participated in ceremonies honoring the victims of the March 19 attack, and met with religious leaders to encourage interfaith dialogue. APP Lyon continued to meet with religious leaders, focusing on the local Muslim community and efforts to curb extremism and intolerance.

The embassy hosted its fourth annual iftar at the ambassador's residence on July 26. The dinner focused on young Muslim leaders and brought together leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities for a dialogue and exchange of views.

The embassy supported the African Diaspora Film Festival's showing of the film "Mooz-Lum" on September 11. The film, which opened the festival, was followed by a discussion of several topics including religious freedom, diversity and the impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the American Muslim community.

The embassy awarded the first Washburne Award for Innovation in Diversity on May 23. Groupe Casino, a French supermarket giant, and KPMG-France, an accounting firm, received the award for their commitment to developing economic opportunities for all citizens through innovative programs promoting diversity in the workplace.

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 in harmony.