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France

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. However, some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public and others provide for monitoring of minority religious group activities. During the reporting period, the government approved legislation that prohibits covering the face in public, which in practice prohibits the wearing of the niqab (face covering veil) and the burqa (full body covering) in public. While the legislation is popular, even with many Muslims, some religious groups criticized the legislation because it restricts some persons' public expression of their religious belief.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There were notable changes in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period, with mixed consequences. The government launched a national antidiscrimination plan, and it investigated and prosecuted criminal behavior directed at religious groups. However, the government prohibited the wearing of the niqab and the burqa in public. Also, groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists expressed concern that government policies contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups and acts of discrimination against these 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 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 64.8 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 of Catholics attend religious services regularly.

An estimated five to six million Muslims--8 to 10 percent of the population--make Islam the second largest religion in the country. 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 in 2007. 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, including Protestants, Buddhists, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox Christians, Scientologists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Sikhs.

According to *Le Figaro*, there are approximately 1.5 million Protestants, constituting approximately 2.5 percent of the population. The French Buddhist Union estimates there are 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. According to a July survey conducted for *La Croix*, 18 percent of Protestants belong to evangelical churches. There are more than 2,600 evangelical churches, including African-style "prosperity" churches located primarily in the suburbs of Paris, composed primarily of African and Antillean immigrants. Jehovah's Witnesses claim approximately 120,000 observant members. Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; most are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox churches.

Other religious groups include the Church of Scientology, Mormons, and Sikhs. The Church of Scientology estimates it has 50,000 members. Mormons estimate their numbers at 35,000, 30 percent of whom are observant. According to United Sikhs in France, there are 10,000 to 11,000 Sikhs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. However, some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public, and others provide for monitoring of minority religious group activities. During the reporting period, the government approved legislation that prohibits the covering of one's face in public, which in practice prohibits the wearing of the niqab (face-covering veil) and the burqa (full body covering) in public. Some religious groups criticized the law because it restricts religious freedom.

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." 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.

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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. 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 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 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 law, 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 Ministry of the Interior, 109 Protestant, 15 Jewish, approximately 30 Islamic, an estimated 100 Catholic, and more than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses associations have tax-exempt status.

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 through 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. According to the Worship Property Committee, there are 55,000 Catholic churches and places of worship in the country, 16,000 of which are protected historical monuments, of which 95 are cathedrals that belong to the state. The state does not own any Muslim, Jewish, or other non-Catholic places of worship.

The government does not give direct financing to religious organizations to build new mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to organizations at rates

advantageous to the groups. It also exempts places of worship from property taxes. In addition the government may fund cultural organizations with a religious connection.

French government officials made verbal commitments to provide funding assistance for construction of the cultural center at the Grand Mosque of Marseille. Groundbreaking for the mosque took place in January. However, by year's end funding for the mosque had not been completed, temporarily halting construction.

On October 11, the government approved a law prohibiting the covering of one's face in public. The Constitutional Council announced on October 7 that the law is constitutional. The sole limitation that it imposes is in public places of worship, where it found that the law's application would unduly interfere with the free exercise of religion. Although not explicitly stated in the law, it is widely recognized that the law is intended to prohibit Muslim women from wearing the burqa or niqab. The law imposes a fine of 150 euros (\$200) on violators or requires 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 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 is doubled if the victim is a minor. The government stated the law is necessary to maintain public order and security. It also stated the new law is a means to protect women's freedom and dignity and to promote the integration of women into society.

Following its passage, application of the law was stayed for a period of six months, during which time the government, with help of civil society organizations such as the French Council for the Muslim Faith (CFCM), was to educate the public about the implications of the new law and explain that "the full veil is not a religious obligation." The Ministry of Interior estimated that only 2,000 women in the country had adopted the full Islamic veil.

On October 27, then-immigration minister Besson inaugurated the six-month mediation and educational effort by launching an operation called "Ambassadors of Secularism and Equality." The Immigration Ministry signed a convention with the NGO Ni Putes Ni Sumises (Neither Whores Nor Submissives) to promote secularism and equality between men and women. The Interior Ministry was providing 80,000 euros (\$106,000) for this program.

The political debate over the wearing of face-covering veils has divided parliament, society, and the Muslim community, although polling suggested popular support for some sort of restriction on wearing the full veil. Human rights organizations in the country were also divided on the law, with some, including the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA), supporting it and others, such as the League of Human Rights, opposing it. Socialist Party opposition to an overall ban on face-covering veils was split. Some argued the problem was being used to divert attention from more urgent matters. 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 and Senate did, however, vote in favor of the complete ban. Most opposition deputies refused to participate in the vote.

On September 23, CFCM president Moussaoui and other Muslim leaders met with President Sarkozy and Interior Minister Hortefeux. Later Moussaoui urged Muslims in the country to respect the law and said the CFCM would work to educate women about the law and assure that the law does not stigmatize Muslims. Moussaoui had previously stated he opposes the burqa but believes leaders should discourage its use through education rather than legislation. The CFCM and the Union of French Islamic Organizations advocated establishing a national institute on the study of Islam and the creation of a parliamentary study group on Islamophobia.

With respect to the law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, the government reported there were no disciplinary cases brought under the law against students in 2009 or during the year. In its response to the report of the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, the government stated that the absence of disciplinary cases suggested public desire to conform to the law's provisions.

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 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. The government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations.

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

The law establishes 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 (one million dollar) fine, while associations are subject to fines, dissolution, or a definitive ban. Advocates for religious minorities expressed the concern, among others, that provisions of this law that allow certain individuals and groups to bring claims could be abused by those seeking to advance an ideological agenda.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There were notable changes in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period, with mixed consequences. The government launched a national antidiscrimination plan, and it investigated and prosecuted criminal behavior directed at religious groups. However, the government prohibited the wearing of face-covering veils in public and groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists expressed concern that government policies contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups and acts of discrimination against these groups.

Charged by the government 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, the Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and to Combat Sectarian Aberrations (MIVILUDES) coordinates the appropriate responses to abuses by such groups, informs the public about potential risks, and helps victims receive aid. Prime Minister Fillon appointed Georges Fenech president of MIVILUDES in 2008.

The government explained in its February 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, had a dialogue with representatives of an organization (not named in the response) that believed it had been stigmatized, to find ways to address the group's concerns. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religious groups. MIVILUDES publishes an annual report as well as several guides intended to identify and protect citizens from what it labels sectarian abuses.

In October 2009 a Paris correctional court found the Church of Scientology and four of its leaders guilty of fraud and fined the organization 600,000 euros (\$800,000) 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, received a two-year suspended sentence and was fined 30,000 euros (\$40,000). The three other leaders received suspended prison sentences ranging from 18 months to two years and fines of 5,000 to 30,000 euros (\$6,650 to \$40,000). The Church of Scientology appealed the ruling. The date for hearing the appeal had not been set at the end of the reporting period.

In September the Education Ministry suspended a teacher for four months following an investigation that concluded she "lacked distance, neutrality, and secularism" and spent too much time planning and leading school trips to Nazi death camps in Poland and the Czech Republic. Education Minister Chatel said the decision was not related to the teacher's religious beliefs but rather was a result of undisclosed "serious incidents" that happened during previous trips organized by the teacher.

On April 23, a woman in Nantes who had converted to Islam was fined 22 euros (\$29) for driving while wearing a niqab, which authorities claimed hindered her vision. The lawyer for the driver disputed the charge, claiming that neither her vision nor freedom of movement was impaired by her clothing, and brought the case to court. On December 13, a Nantes court found there was no infraction and dismissed the fine.

In 2008 a Muslim employee of a suburban Paris daycare center was fired for refusing to remove her full veil while on duty. She filed a discrimination complaint with the High Authority Against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE). The HALDE's legal committee agreed there was discrimination because the principles of secularism that apply to the public sector do not apply to the private sector. However, former HALDE president Bougrab publicly disagreed with the legal committee and instructed it to reconsider its decision, stating religious freedom was no more important than secularism, both of which are constitutional principles. Current HALDE president Molinie announced on December 6 that he would reverse Bougrab's decision and respect the legal committee's opinion.

With the support of the HALDE's legal committee, the former daycare center employee filed a discrimination claim in court, seeking 80,000 euros (\$106,000) in damages from her former employer. On December 13, the court upheld the firing. The former employee appealed the decision.

On September 21, the European Court of Human Rights ruled unanimously that a 2005 complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses was admissible. The complaint challenged a series of decisions by the courts that required the Jehovah's Witnesses to pay taxes on donations received; the taxes would total more than the value of the group's assets. The assessed tax of 57 million euros (\$76 million) would consume all of the group's assets in the country and could compel its closure. Those decisions were the first and only decisions related to taxes on donations received by a not-for-profit corporation.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On November 8, the government welcomed 36 Iraqis who were wounded in the October 31 attack on a Catholic Church in Baghdad and 21 accompanying family members to receive medical treatment. Then-immigration minister Besson stated the government would provide refugee status to 150 Iraqis belonging to religious minorities, with priority being given to those injured in the attack and their family members. Since 2007 the country has granted asylum to 1,300 Iraqis because of their religious affiliation.

On November 4, the national railway company SNCF publicly apologized for its role in transporting 76,000 French and other European Jews to Germany, where they were sent to Nazi death camps. According to SNCF, Nazi Germany requisitioned its trains as part of its war effort, and in 1995 President Chirac recognized France's responsibility for the deportations. The company expressed its "profound pain and regret" for the consequences of its actions. SNCF continued

to support remembrance activities and memorials. On December 13, SNCF signed a partnership with the Memorial of the Shoah to increase educational outreach and historical research activities.

Since May 28, 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses in prison can receive visits from fellow believers, although the government does not employ any Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains because there is not sufficient demand. This change follows five recent decisions by the Administrative Court of Paris, which ruled on five separate cases in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses having their own chaplains in prison. In February the HALDE also 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 deny a prisoner the right to be visited by a chaplain of his own religion only if it is necessary, legitimate, and proportionate. The HALDE stated in this case the number of believers at a particular prison is not a criterion.

A November 2009 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 chaplains has increased since 2008 and efforts have been made to improve access to food appropriate for prisoners with religious dietary restrictions. Religious celebrations, such as Ramadan, are observed in prisons.

On September 6, Interior Minister Hortefeux attended a Jewish New Year ceremony organized by the main synagogue in Paris; he assured attendees that authorities were doing their utmost to fight anti-Semitism.

On September 7, the interior minister attended the iftar (the evening meal during Ramadan) hosted by the CFCM; he stated the government was fighting against both "Islamophobia" and extremist forms of Islam.

The Interior Ministry continued to fund a program at the Catholic Institute of Paris entitled "Religion, Secularism, and InterCulturalism." Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum for the training program that included 30 students for the academic year. Although the program is open to persons of all faiths, Muslims have expressed the greatest interest in the program. Consequently, the program seeks to address the fact most imams come from overseas and do not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations and their understanding of local customs and laws. Initiated in collaboration with the Paris mosque, the program, for which the government provides 60 percent of funding, 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.

The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor nationwide courses and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. It has a partnership with the LICRA to educate students about anti-Semitism and racism. LICRA provides educational tools, works directly in schools, and organizes trips to educate students about racism.

In August the government announced the launching of a national action plan to fight racism. The plan's aim is to coordinate action to prevent and fight racism. In this framework, the Interior Ministry and the LICRA signed a cooperation agreement on December 1 to facilitate the exchange of data related to racist and anti-Semitic acts on a national level between the government and the NGO. The agreement also put in place regular training for police and gendarmes to prevent racist acts.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

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 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.

According to the interior minister, 486 cemeteries and places of worship were desecrated between January 1 and September 30. Of these, 410 were Christian, 40 were Muslim, and 35 were Jewish. The minister stated on November 2 that 68 persons, including 51 minors, had been arrested for suspected desecration since the beginning of the year.

The Jewish Community Protection Service (SPCJ) and Ministry of Interior reported a 46 percent reduction in anti-Semitic incidents during the year, compared with 2009. They reported 466 incidents, including 131 anti-Semitic acts and 335 threats. The SPCJ, Anti-Defamation League, and French NGO National Center for Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism, however, each reported an increase in anti-Semitic acts following the May 31 Gaza flotilla incident. An official of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions (CRIF) 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 National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) report, approximately a third of complaints of racism 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 with two in 2008. Members of the Arab Muslim community also experienced instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism during the reporting period.

On October 14, a Paris court found a citizen guilty of aggravated assault for attacking a citizen of the United Arab Emirates who was wearing a face-covering veil. The court gave the French citizen a one-month suspended sentence and ordered her to pay a fine of 750 euros (\$1,000). It also ordered her to pay 800 euros (\$1,065) in damages to the victim.

On July 15, anti-Islam slurs and swastikas were found on the walls of a mosque under construction in Herouville-Saint-Clair in Normandy. Then-Immigration Minister Besson released a statement expressing his indignation and describing the vandalism as "cowardly" and "foolish" and added that "France has always been and will remain a land of immigration and integration."

Between July 18 and 21, 27 graves in the Wolfisheim Jewish cemetery near Strasbourg were desecrated and headstones were overturned. Political and religious figures from across the spectrum condemned the vandalism. Graves were also destroyed in the Jewish cemetery of Bar-le-Duc (northeastern France). Authorities launched investigations into both incidents.

On July 23, a synagogue was desecrated in Melun, southeast of Paris. Vandals covered the synagogue with swastikas, calls for the return of Hitler, and violent anti-Semitic epithets. Palestinians were also targeted in the graffiti. The interior minister released a statement calling this incident "odious, intolerable, and shocking."

On August 4, racist and anti-Semitic graffiti were discovered on a memorial to World War II deportees and the walls of a public housing development in Marmande in the Southwest. The local government and the association responsible for constructing the memorial stated that they would file complaints against the perpetrators.

On September 3, eight adolescents attacked with a knife a Russian citizen following a verbal dispute in a Paris park. According to the victim's lawyer, the adolescents began to attack him after they noticed he was wearing a Star of David around his neck. Police arrested three minors who were later released. The Public Prosecutor's Office immediately

appealed the decision to release the minors. The judge in charge of the judicial investigation stated that he would prosecute the case as a religious hate crime.

On September 4, a controversial street party took place in Paris and five other cities. The so-called "Great Republican Cocktail" was organized to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Third Republic and French secularism. An estimated 200 persons representing 20 different groups defending the country's "white identity" attended the event in Paris, during which organizers denounced "the danger that Islam represents for the Republic."

During the night of September 23-24, 36 Muslim gravestones were desecrated in the Muslim cemetery "La Meinau" in Strasbourg. Politicians and religious organizations immediately condemned the desecration.

On September 23, police discovered approximately 20 vandalized gravestones in a Catholic cemetery in Frontenay-Rohan-Rohan. The incident remained under investigation.

There were several attacks on mosques, including a December 5 attempted forced entry at the Annour Mosque in Roanne, which reportedly included attaching xenophobic statements to the walls. On November 27, the mosque in Marmande was desecrated with racist and xenophobic slurs. Authorities continued to investigate both incidents.

At a December 10 political gathering, National Front political party president Marine Le Pen made statements comparing Muslims praying in public to the Nazi occupation of France, saying that both were an "occupation of territory." Le Pen's comments were roundly criticized by government and religious leaders. The NGO Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples stated it would file a civil suit against Le Pen for "incitement of racial hatred."

Officials continue to investigate the alleged murder of a Muslim man by Jewish assailants but did not announce a trial date. On March 31, 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. By the end of the reporting period, four men between the ages of 19 and 25 had been investigated for their involvement in the case, with three placed in preventative detention for first-degree murder.

Officials continued to investigate an attack on David Pariente, a Jewish man who was wearing a yarmulke, by two assailants with a knife and an iron rod in Strasbourg on April 30, but had not announced a trial date. Police immediately apprehended the two suspects, releasing an individual identified as a witness in the attack while charging the assailant, an Algerian national, with "attempted aggravated murder" on May 2. The magistrate presiding over the case acknowledged the anti-Semitic nature of the incident, as the assailant, who the court determined to be mentally ill, confessed to authorities that he attacked the victim only because he was wearing a yarmulke.

On December 17, following a government appeal, the court increased the sentences of the two main accomplices of Youssouf Fofana, who was convicted of the brutal torture-murder of Ilan Halimi, a 23-year-old Jewish man, from 15 to 18 years' imprisonment. The court confirmed the sentences of 15 other accomplices, whose sentences ranged from six months deferred to 18 years in prison. Fofana was sentenced to life in prison (and not eligible for parole for at least 22 years).

Jehovah's Witnesses' officials noted that between July 1 and December 1, seven adherents were physically attacked. As of December 1, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 26 acts of vandalism of places of worship, including use of Molotov cocktails and firearms.

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 more basic than sought. 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, may have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community again alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were sometimes refused service by private businesses.

On November 9, the government deported a "radical" imam to Egypt for his hostile comments about the West that were contrary to French values, according to the Ministry of Interior. The law authorizes the expulsion of aliens for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons." The interior minister stated government authorities had been following the "increasingly dangerous" preaching of Ali Ibrahim el-Soudany since 2008. The minister emphasized that "the preachers of hate, who have nothing to do with religious freedom, have no place on French territory." This was the second time el-Soudany was deported from France. He was previously deported in January but managed to reenter the country. 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.

Several NGOs initiated court challenges to one of the National Front party's election posters. 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 LICRA and ordered 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. Following another suit filed by the LICRA and SOS Racism on December 1, the Paris Criminal Court acquitted former president of the National Front Jean-Marie Le Pen of charges of religious incitement against Muslims on the ground that he was not personally responsible for the posters.

The CFCM began a concerted effort to take cases of discrimination to court. It aimed to show the Muslim community that the justice system was equipped to deal with these cases and to discourage Muslims from seeking retribution.

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 adequate.

On June 17, the interior minister and the CFCM president signed a convention to implement a daily tallying and assessment of anti-Muslim acts. The convention foresaw quarterly meetings of personnel from the Interior Ministry and CFCM to crosscheck statistics. The ministry and CFCM held their first meeting in November. The ministry already had a similar agreement with the CRIF and offered to sign such agreements with other religious groups.

In September National Assembly Deputy Claude Bodin was appointed president of a parliamentary commission to find ways to prevent desecration of places of worship and cemeteries. The commission was expected to announce concrete actions including a new law to collect reliable statistics on desecrations. The commission was expected to release its conclusions in spring 2011.

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.

On October 4, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, founder of the Jewish-Muslim Association of France (AJMF), launched the second half of his sixth annual 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, a French national of Moroccan origin, decided to engage in this work after he suffered an anti-Semitic attack.

On November 5-7, the AJMF organized an "Open Doors" weekend for Jewish and Muslim groups. Mosques and synagogues throughout the country paired and organized activities to bring members of the two faiths together to encourage dialogue.

After terrorist threats were made against the country on the pretext that it banned face veils, the CFCM issued a statement condemning any act of hostility toward France or its citizens. It also called on Muslims in the country to be vigilant about any threats.

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. Additionally the Bishops Conference, through its National Service for Relations with Islam, organizes an annual training session on Islam to maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations and to advise Christians who have contact with Muslims.

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 discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy actively promotes 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 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 and the Church of Scientology. Embassy officials hosted visits from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, CRIF, European Jewish Congress, United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center. The embassy also conducted regular outreach to Muslim communities throughout the country, and the ambassador hosted an annual iftar with a focus on young Muslim leaders. Washington-based State Department representatives also traveled to the country to conduct outreach activities.

The embassy conducts a public affairs outreach program to minority communities throughout the country. The embassy also played a role in supporting projects of NGOs, such as SOS Racism, that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment and actions. 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 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.

American Presence Post (APP) Bordeaux participated in the annual Jewish-Muslim friendship meeting, while APP Lyon continued to focus its engagement on the local Muslim community, from youth to religious leaders, attempting to curb the formation of religious extremism and intolerance.

The embassy supported an Open Mosque and Open Synagogue exchange event November 5 to 7. This initiative opened the two largest Jewish and Muslim centers of worship in Paris to each other's members, bringing together members of both religious groups in dialogue and exchange.

The embassy's public affairs section helped 30 delegates from the NGO Europe Diversity Caucus organize and prepare a trip to the United States to meet U.S. officials and elected representatives. The group hoped to be able to compare progress toward the integration of minorities in the United States and Europe.

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.

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