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Liechtenstein

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, the government took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 61.7 square miles and a population of 35,400. According to the 2000 census, membership in religious denominations was as follows: 78.4 percent Roman Catholic, 8.3 percent Protestant, 4.5 percent Muslim, 1.1 percent Orthodox Christian, 0.1 percent Jewish, 0.4 percent other religious groups, 2.8 percent professed no formal creed, and 4.1 percent did not indicate religious affiliation in the census.

The Muslim community has grown over the last two decades as a result of an influx of migrants primarily from Turkey, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, many of whom resettled from other Western European countries. According to official census statistics, the Muslim population increased from 689 in 1990 to 1,593 in 2000.

A government-contracted survey of 600 residents published in April 2008 found that 40 percent of the population participated in formal religious services at least once a month. Muslims were the most active religious group--44 percent attended religious service at least once a week, compared to 23 percent of Catholics and 24 percent of other Christians.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The criminal code prohibits any form of discrimination against or debasement of any religion or its adherents. The constitution makes the Catholic Church the "National Church" of the country, and as such it enjoys the full protection of the state. The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Funding for religious institutions comes from municipalities and from the general budget, as decided by parliament; it is not a direct "tithe" paid by citizens. The government gives money not only to the Catholic Church, but also to other denominations. Catholic and Protestant churches receive regular annual contributions from the government in proportion to membership as determined in the census of 2000; smaller religious groups were eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. The two main representative bodies of the Muslim community (the Islamische Gemeinschaft and the Tuerkischer Verein) have worked out a draft document in collaboration with governmental authorities to form an umbrella organization that would receive state contributions to be used equitably for all Muslims residing in the country. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

In December 2008, in the context of the country's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights reiterated its 2005 recommendation that the government "...ensure that minority religious communities are not discriminated against on procedural or other grounds when state subsidies are allocated to religious communities."

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Candlemas/Groundhog Day, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, The Nativity of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Saint Stephen's Day. Assumption Day (August 15) is celebrated as National Day. Sunday is a public holiday; shops remain closed and Sunday work is generally not allowed.

To receive a religious worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization in Liechtenstein is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited by an acknowledged religious group. Visa requests for religious workers were normally issued and were processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals.

The government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam, plus one short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government routinely grants visas to the imams of the Turkish Association and the Muslim community who agree not to allow sermons that incite violence or advocate intolerance

Religious education is part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic or Protestant religious education is compulsory in all primary schools, but the authorities routinely granted exemptions for children whose parents requested them. The curriculum for Catholic confessional education is determined by the Roman Catholic Church with only a minor complementary supervisory role by the municipalities, with the exception of Balzers, Triesen, and Planken, which have stronger governmental supervision.

At the secondary school level, parents and pupils choose between traditional confessional education organized by their religious community and the nonconfessional subject "Religion and Culture." Since its introduction in 2003, 90 percent of Catholic pupils have chosen the nonconfessional subject. Representatives of the Protestant community complained that the "Religion and Culture" course in effect eliminated classes in Protestant doctrine because it made it virtually impossible for the minority community to meet the quorum of four students to hold confessional classes as part of the regular curriculum. As an alternative Protestant churches offered religious education classes at the churches outside regular school hours with financial support from the government.

In the 2007-08 school year, the government for the first time introduced Islamic education classes in public primary schools in five municipalities. Approximately 70 pupils enrolled. The government required that instructors have both pedagogical and subject training and that classes be held in German. The Institute for Interreligious Pedagogics and Didactics in Cologne, Germany developed the curriculum, and the Department of Education supervised instruction. Previously, Muslim parents could send their children only to a mosque for religious instruction. This pilot project was expected to continue and, after an evaluation, officials planned to integrate it into the regular curriculum.

Since 2004 the government has maintained a working group for the better integration of Muslims into society, consisting of representatives and officials who deal with Islamic issues. The working group's objectives are to counter mutual prejudices and promote respect and tolerance on the basis of dialogue and mutual understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, Catholics, Protestants, and members of other religious groups worked well together on an ecumenical basis. Differences among religious groups were not a significant source of tension in society.

The government's Equal Opportunity Office is charged with handling complaints of religious discrimination; during the reporting period, the office received no such complaints.

In its third country report, released in April 2008, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted it had received reports of instances of verbal and physical abuse against Muslims, particularly women wearing headscarves. ECRI also expressed concern about instances of alleged racial discrimination in access to employment and housing, primarily against Muslims from Turkey and the Balkans. The report also recorded complaints of Muslim community leaders about the lack of an adequate mosque and Muslim cemetery, as well as about difficulties in finding suitable premises for their cultural activities. The government maintained that its working group on Islamic integration has dealt actively with the issue of a cemetery, but that the Muslim members of the group had not always treated the issue as a priority.

On May 12, 2010, the Association of the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem, in collaboration with the Jewish Museum of Hohenems, Austria, and the Liechtenstein Cultural Foundation, inaugurated a special exhibit on the history of Jews in Liechtenstein, which was planned to continue until February 6, 2011.

On January 27, 2010, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the government held a special memorial hour to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. The government called on the population to commemorate the historic date and presented the Day of Remembrance as part of the government's efforts to fight racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Since 2003 secondary schools have held discussion forums on the Holocaust on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance.

A government-contracted study on religious attitudes and practices released in April 2008, which surveyed 600 of the country's residents, found that majority attitudes toward religious groups are largely characterized by tolerance. However, approximately 30 percent of respondents harbored negative views of Muslims, and 17 percent expressed critical views of Jews.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts against persons or property. The Jewish community is too small to have an organizational structure.

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 and the Office of Foreign Affairs conduct an annual discussion of issues related to religious freedom in preparation for this report.

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