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Luxembourg

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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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 999 square miles and a population of 460,000. The country is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remains the predominant faith. According to a 1979 law, the government may not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation; however, the Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that more than 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist churches are the largest Protestant denominations; Anglicans are also present. The local press estimates that there are 9,000 Muslims; 5,000 Orthodox Christians (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian); and 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There is no state religion; however, some churches receive financial support from the state. The constitution specifically provides for state payment of salaries and pensions of clergy of those religious groups that sign agreements negotiated with the government. The following religious groups receive such support: Catholic; Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Serbian Orthodox; Anglican; the Reformed Protestant Church of Luxembourg; the Protestant Church of Luxembourg; and Jewish congregations.

Following the resignation in 2008 of its national representative, the Muslim community continued to be represented by a temporary president and thus a temporary Shura for more than a year. New Shura elections were expected to take place in July or August 2010. Hardly any progress was made during the reporting period because of the temporary nature of the Shura. One of the main conditions required by the Ministry of Religious Communities for a convention with the Muslim community is an official and stable Shura representing all Islamic Center councils of the country.

An additional contentious point has been the frequent instances by Islamic Center councils of recalling their representative on the Shura board without providing advance notice or explanation. The Ministry of Religious Communities therefore requested legal changes to the statutes of the Islamic Center councils to address this situation and provide more long-term stability to Shura membership.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Shrove Monday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Christmas, and the second day of Christmas.

There is a long tradition of religious education in public schools. A 1997 convention between the minister of national education and the Catholic archbishop governs religious instruction. In accordance with this convention, religious instruction is a local matter, coordinated at the communal level (there are 116 communes that regulate local affairs) between representatives of the Catholic Church and communal authorities. There are government-salaried religious instructors at all levels in public schools. Parents and pupils may choose between instruction in Catholicism or an ethics course. Schools grant exemption from this instruction on an individual basis. Approximately 81 percent of primary school pupils and 57 percent of high school students choose religious instruction.

The government subsidizes all public schools and also private religious schools whose religious group has signed a convention with the state. The government also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

In 2006 the country's education initiative to provide religious and moral instruction for students in their last year of coursework received favorable notice in the European Union's Report on Discrimination and Islamophobia. The initiative was begun as a pilot program in 2004 in one high school, which remains the only school in the program; it focuses on interfaith dialogue and explains the basic religious precepts of non-Christian religions. This program was developed in consultation with the Catholic Church and Muslim community, among others. Although originally scheduled to be made universal for high school students in their final year, at the end of the reporting period it was no longer expected to be made universal.

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. The only distinction made is between religious groups that receive financial funding from the government and those that do not.

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 no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim groups coexisted amicably. Differences among religious groups were not a significant source of tension in society.

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Although the Jewish community reported no serious concern about anti-Semitism, community leaders indicated there was occasional conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, with criticism of Israel and Israeli policies directed toward the community even when the connection was not valid.

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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. Embassy officers met with representatives of government ministries at the working level to discuss matters related to religious freedom. During the reporting period, they also met with representatives from religious groups and nongovernmental organizations, none of whom voiced any concern over the state of religious freedom in the country.

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