



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Switzerland

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. However, negative reaction to immigration, the conflict in the Middle East, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries, have increased intolerance towards religious minorities. The growing Muslim population, a number of reports of Muslim clerics preaching extremist views, and the international controversy over the Danish newspaper cartoons of the prophet Muhammad have spurred the public debate on the role of Muslim believers in society.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 15,942 square miles and a population of approximately 7.29 million. Three-quarters of the population nominally adhered to either the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches, but actual church attendance rates were much lower. The Muslim population was the largest religious minority, making up approximately 4 percent of the resident population. More than 11 percent of citizens claimed no formal allegiance to any church or religious community.

Over the past several years, noticeable membership shifts occurred within the various religious denominations. Historically, more than 95 percent of the population was evenly split between the Swiss Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church; however, since the 1970s, there has been a steady increase of persons formally renouncing their church membership. In the Roman Catholic Church, immigration from southern Europe has countered this trend. The arrival of immigrants from other areas has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities that had little presence in the country in the past. According to the Government's Statistics Office, membership in religious denominations was as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 33.0 percent Protestant; 1.8 percent Orthodox; 0.2 percent Old Catholic; 0.2 percent other Christian groups; 4.3 percent Muslim; 0.2 percent Jewish; 0.8 percent other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, and other); and 11.1 percent professed no formal creed.

According to official census statistics, the Muslim population increased significantly from 57,000 in 1980, to 152,000 in 1990, and to 311,000 in 2000. Muslim immigrants from North African countries typically settled in the French-speaking western part of the country, whereas those arriving from Turkey, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia commonly relocated in the German-speaking eastern and central parts. There were two major mosques, one in Zurich (built in 1963 and belonging to the Ahmadiyya movement) and one in Geneva (built in 1978 and financed by Saudi Arabia). There were approximately 120 Muslim centers located throughout the country in private homes or office complexes.

Approximately 75 percent of Jewish households were located in the urban areas of four major cities: Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern. There were four distinguishable Jewish subgroups: orthodox, conservative, liberal, and reform. An estimated 15 percent of Jews belonged to the orthodox branch.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Article 15 of the constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the Federal Penal Code prohibits any form of debasement or discrimination of any religion or any religious adherents.

There is no official state church; religious matters are handled by the cantons (states), according to Article 72 of the constitution. Most of the twenty-six cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separated) financially support at least one of the three traditional religious communities—Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant—with funds collected through taxation. Each canton observes its own regulations regarding the relationship between church and state. In some cantons, the church tax is voluntary, but in others

an individual who chooses not to contribute to church tax may have to leave the church formally. In some cantons, private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant "church taxation" status, which the traditional three Christian communities enjoy, to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

In February 2005, voters in Zurich canton comfortably adopted a new Cantonal Constitution that grants the three traditional Christian communities greater autonomy in regulating their internal affairs. The new constitution also grants official recognition to two local Jewish communities but does not provide for the raising of funds through taxation as with the three Christian communities. Neither does the new constitution provide for the official recognition of Islam or other religious communities. On October 30, 2005, voters in Basel adopted a new cantonal constitution that paves the way for granting non-traditional religious communities, including Islam, recognition as official religions under cantonal law. The Basel cantonal constitution was awaiting approval by the Federal Parliament when the period covered by this report ended.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

In 2004, the Federal Council (cabinet) decided to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican in order to establish full diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

Groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize. Foreign missionaries must obtain a "religious worker" visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof that the foreigner would not displace a citizen from doing the job, has formally completed theological training, and would be supported financially by the host organization. The host organization must acknowledge the country's legal order and must not tolerate its abuse by members, either in theory or in practice. During 2004 and 2005, a total of 60 ordained clergymen and 120 non-ordained religious employees were working on short-term permits in the country.

Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. Classes in Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines are normally offered; some schools also cover other religious groups living in the country. In Lucerne Canton, two municipalities have offered religious classes in Muslim doctrine since 2002. In some cantons, religious classes are entirely voluntary, while in others they form part of the curriculum; waivers, however, are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Those of different faiths are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by their church, or they may teach their children at home.

A number of cantons reformed religious education in public schools during the reporting period to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrine with non-confessional teachings about religion and culture. French-speaking primary schools in Fribourg, Vaud, Wallis, Jura, and Bern adopted a new religious tutorial that gives prominent coverage to non-Christian denominations as well. In the central part of the country, authorities in a number of cantons decided to complement religious classes being offered by the individual religious communities with secular teachings about ethics and religion. The first of these cantons, Obwalden, introduced its religion and ethics program in 2005. In Zurich, the government's board of public education decided to introduce a new subject, Religion and Culture, to secondary schools, which would expose pupils to all major religious traditions, with no precedence given to any one of them, in an effort to foster interconfessional understanding and tolerance in a multi-cultural society. Textbooks and the curriculum were being drafted and the training of lay teachers was being prepared. Classes were scheduled to begin in school year 2007-2008. At the primary school level, authorities announced plans also to introduce secularized religious instruction in a move to counter a citizens' ballot initiative against a 2004 government decision to cut funding for traditional classes in biblical history. The Canton of Basel was contemplating similar steps but had not made any firm decisions by the end of the period covered by this report. In virtually all cantons contemplating or implementing reform, authorities planned to make the non-confessional teachings about religion and culture a non-elective part of the curriculum for all pupils.

The question of waivers other than from religious classes gave rise to some controversy at the end of 2005 after the county of Stettlen in the Canton of Bern excused a nine-year-old girl from a Muslim family from swimming and from some physical education classes. In spring 2006, however, the Libyan refugee family withdrew the demand for special treatment of their daughter. There are no national guidelines regarding exemptions on religious grounds, and practices vary. Some cantons have issued guidelines not to excuse pupils from swimming or physical education classes despite a contrary ruling of the Federal Tribunal (Supreme Court) from 1993, holding that such exemptions on religious grounds are constitutional. Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but school authorities at the county level wield some discretionary power in their implementation.

The debate over the country's World War II record contributed to the problem of anti-Semitism. To counter anti-Semitism and racism, in 2001, the Federal Department of the Interior created the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism to coordinate antiracism activities of the Federal Administration with cantonal and communal authorities. Between 2001 and 2005, this service managed a project fund of \$11.1 million (15 million Swiss francs), which supported more than 500 projects to combat racism, including some projects specifically addressing the problem of anti-Semitism. After the completion of the one-time project fund, the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism continued to support anti-racism activities with money from the regular federal budget. For the year 2006, Parliament earmarked \$640 thousand (800 thousand Swiss francs) to fund projects.

Of the fourteen political parties represented in the Federal Parliament, four (the Christian Democratic Party, the Evangelical People's Party, the Federal Democratic Union, and the Christian Social Party) subscribe to a religious philosophy. There were no reports of individuals being excluded from a political party because of their religious beliefs.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were several reports of authorities taking measures to prevent or stop Muslim clerics from spreading religious ideas that clash with basic precepts of the country's legal order.

In 2004, the Federal Office of Migration (FOM) rejected the 2003 work permit applications of two Muslim clerics that the Islamic Center in Geneva had filed with local authorities because of the extremist views of the Islamic Center's leader, Hani Ramadan. On October 5, 2005, the Justice Ministry's appeals body upheld the FOM decision, thus setting a precedent of rejecting work permit applications for Muslim imams on ideological grounds.

In 2004, Basel authorities asked a Muslim imam to depart the country after learning that the imam, a Saudi national working as a lay teacher in a local Muslim school, had justified some form of domestic violence based on teachings of the Qur'an. Basel follows a zero-tolerance policy regarding the interpretation in public of religious texts that violate the constitution or federal or cantonal law.

In May 2005, a Geneva administrative court ordered the cantonal government to recognize Hani Ramadan's status as public servant and resume paying his salary. Ramadan was suspended from his duties as public school teacher in the fall of 2002, following the publication of an article in the French newspaper *Le Monde* in which he favored the stoning of adulterers as set out in Islamic law (Shari'a). Ramadan, who heads the Islamic Center in Geneva, was dismissed in 2003 following an administrative investigation, but he successfully appealed the decision. Following a second investigation, however, the Geneva cantonal government confirmed Ramadan's dismissal and removed him from the cantonal payroll in December 2004. The cantonal government stated its intention to honor the administrative court ruling but not to re-instate Ramadan in his former teaching duties.

In September 2005, the city of Fribourg dismissed two school employees for refusing to remove their Islamic headscarves during working hours. The two young women were employed to tend to children after school hours. Fribourg had previously banned the wearing of religious apparel in schools. The Canton of Geneva has a similar provision which has been upheld by the Federal Tribunal (Supreme Court) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR found that the Canton of Geneva's legal provisions did not discriminate against religious convictions, but were meant to protect the rights of other subjects as well as the public order.

Resident Muslim organizations complained that it was nearly impossible to acquire zoning approval to build mosques or Muslim cemeteries, since this authority rested with individual counties and municipalities. The building commission of the northwestern village of Wangen in the Canton of Solothurn blocked the plans of a local Turkish cultural association to add a minaret to its house of worship. Officially, the planned eighteen-foot (six-meter) high minaret was blocked because of violations of zoning restrictions, but the association reportedly believed the decision to be political. When the association filed the building permit application in September 2005, local political opposition quickly formed, and community leaders took a public stance against the project. The association stated its intention to appeal the decision to the cantonal justice department.

Reports from the Cantons of Aargau and Bern stated that Muslim communities there faced similar opposition to community building projects. There were two minarets in the country, at the Geneva and Zurich mosques.

Ritual slaughter (the bleeding to death of animals that have not first been stunned) was made illegal in the country in 1893; however, a 1978 Law on the Protection of Animals explicitly allows for the importation of kosher and halal meat. Imported from France and Germany, this meat is available in the country at comparable prices. In 2003, a popular initiative to protect animal rights and prohibit the import of meat from animals bled without stunning was filed; in December 2005, however, the sponsors withdrew their initiative before it had been submitted to a national vote after Parliament adopted a revision of the Law on the Protection of Animals.

On May 10, 2006, the Federal Tribunal (Supreme Court) upheld the decision of authorities in the Canton of Basel to reject the citizenship application of a Turkish national woman on the grounds that she lacked a desire to integrate into society. The woman, who worked as a voluntary religious teacher, had appealed the rejection, claiming that it was due to her profession of Islam and her corresponding living habits. The Federal Tribunal opined that the negative decision of the Basel authorities was neither discriminatory nor a violation of religious freedom rights, but rather a manifestation of the legal precept that individuals who voluntarily seclude themselves from the population should be denied citizenship. At the same time, it held that the appeal raised delicate questions and therefore decided to cover the legal costs of the indigent woman in spite of the negative ruling.

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

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 29, 2006, the Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) hosted a conference in Geneva to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Roman Catholic Church's declaration *Nostra Aetate* and to discuss interreligious dialogue between Jews and Catholics. Participants included senior representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish community, as well as Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin.

On May 8, 2006, the Zurich cantonal parliament held the opening ceremony of its annual session in a local synagogue instead of the typical setting of a Christian church. The ceremony was meant to honor the official recognition of two Jewish communities under the new cantonal constitution that entered into force at the beginning of 2006.

In December 2005, the Federal Council (cabinet) allocated \$8 million (10 million Swiss francs) to the Swiss National Science Foundation for a new research program to study the transformation of individual forms of belief and the changing role of religious communities in society in recent years. The objective of the research program was to delineate areas of conflict between adherents of different creeds, as well as between believers and nonbelievers, and to develop ways to ease religious tensions. The program was also expected to pave the way for debate on an eventual article on religion in the constitution.

The federal Government joined with national youth associations to support the Council of Europe's youth campaign "All Different-All Equal" to promote diversity, human rights, and political participation. The campaign, which was scheduled to run from June 2006 to September 2007, aimed to involve as many youths as possible in local and regional projects.

The country participated in the April 2004 conference sponsored by the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on anti-Semitism, in Berlin. State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Franz von Daniken highlighted the various ways through which the country was confronting anti-Semitism. He condemned all forms of racism and anti-Semitism and fully endorsed the OSCE measures to promote tolerance and nondiscrimination.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

Senior leaders of the country's Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities met in Bern on May 15, 2006, to formally establish a Swiss Council of Religions to promote interreligious dialogue and to serve as a consultation partner for the federal Government. The Council was meant to foster religious peace; to build confidence between different faiths; to find common positions on issues of mutual interest; and to engage in political dialogue on faith-related and social issues. Inspiration for this Council sprang from an interreligious ceremony held in Bern cathedral in March 2003, on the eve of the Iraq war. Implementation began following a July 2004 meeting of high-level representatives belonging to the three religious communities in Bern. The Swiss Council of Religions included senior representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholics, the Swiss Protestant Church, and the Muslim and Jewish communities. Evangelical churches, the Christian Orthodox Church, and other religions were not represented but could join the Council at a later stage.

On January 23, 2005, representatives of ten Christian denominations in the country signed the Charta Oecumenica, an ecumenical charter concerning closer cooperation in Europe, after a televised inter-confessional service in the Church of St. Ursanne in northwestern Switzerland. The text of the charter, written in 2001 by representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions, mentioned the need for Christian unity in Europe and a common approach to spreading the Christian faith. However, in November 2004, the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches had instructed its ministers not to administer Holy Communion jointly with Roman Catholic clergy. The 2004 recommendation came only months after the Vatican's instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, which reaffirmed the exclusion of non-Catholics from the celebration of Holy Communion.

The Swiss Observatory of Religions based in Lausanne noted an increase in anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic feelings over the last decade. In a statement following the March 2005 arson attack on the Lugano synagogue, the Federal Commission Against Racism observed that the climate against members of religious minorities and their institutions had deteriorated in general. Although physical violence was rare, most anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks have largely been fueled by extensive media reports over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holocaust Assets issue, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries.

In March 2005, two arson attacks were launched in the city of Lugano, in the southern canton of Ticino, one against a clothing store owned by a Jewish family and another against the synagogue. The attacks completely destroyed the clothing store and severely damaged the ground floor beneath the main sanctuary of the synagogue. No one was hurt in either incident. Shortly after the incidents, police arrested a 58-year-old resident Italian national with a mental condition, who confessed to the arson attacks. The Ticino cantonal prosecutor later publicly stated that the perpetrator had acted alone without any apparent connection to other individuals and ruled out overtly anti-Semitic motives for the two arson attacks, a claim the psychiatric evaluation later corroborated. In November 2005, a Ticino court sentenced the Italian national to two years in prison; the sentence was suspended for psychiatric treatment. Though more recent attacks on synagogues had been restricted to vandalism and anti-Semitic graffiti, the arson attack in Lugano was the first instance in living memory of the burning of a house of worship within the country. President Samuel Schmid immediately condemned the arson attacks and pledged government support in fighting anti-Semitism. Three days after the attacks, over 1,000 people, including representatives of all major religious communities, gathered in Lugano to express their support for the Jewish community.

During the night of March 31, 2006, unidentified vandals smashed several windows of the synagogue in Lausanne. The local Jewish community filed a report with the police. CICAD denounced the attack and expressed concern over the series of anti-Semitic incidents occurring in the French part of the country. In April 2005, vandals spray-painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of, and on a Holocaust memorial just outside of, the Grand Synagogue in Geneva. In May 2005, unidentified vandals desecrated a dozen tombs of the Jewish cemetery of Vevey-Montreux. No suspects were arrested.

In 2005, CICAD recorded seventy-five anti-Semitic incidents in the western, French-speaking part of the country, ranging from verbal and written assaults to offensive graffiti and acts of vandalism against Jewish property. In 2004, the year recordings began, CICAD noted thirty-four incidents. The former president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities cautioned that the CICAD statistics did not represent a wider national trend.

According to data gathered by the Federal Commission against Racism, between 1995 and 2002 there were 212 prosecutions for violations of the anti-racism clause, leading to 110 indictments that resulted in 89 convictions. Most prominent among the identified victims were Jews, followed by foreigners of different ethnic origin and dark-skinned people. More than 70 percent of the racist acts were verbal or written slurs, or the distribution of racist material; only 3 percent were physical assaults.

In his radio and television address commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, President Schmid stated that it was in the best interest of all to resolutely oppose all totalitarian and extremist endeavors, as well as all forms of racism and anti-Semitism.

In July 2005, the Zurich cantonal prosecutor closed the investigation of a political advertisement for violation of the anti-racism law; no charges were made. During the national referendum campaign to ease restrictions on granting citizenship to second- and third-generation immigrants, opponents ran a controversial advertisement suggesting that the Muslim population would double every decade and would become the majority population within the country by 2040. The Zurich cantonal prosecutor concluded that the advertisement created a climate of fear but did not incite discrimination or denigrate members of the Muslim community. The electorate rejected the constitutional amendments on easing citizenship restrictions in a national ballot vote in September 2004.

Prompted by the international controversy over the (re-)publication of Muhammad cartoons in a Danish newspaper, three of the four major political parties communicated their positions regarding the relationship between the state and the Muslim community. In April 2006, the center-left Christian Democratic Party (CVP) published a twenty-page white paper on the role of Muslim believers in society. The paper stressed the primacy of the standing legal order, emphasizing the equality of the sexes and the ban on forced marriage and domestic violence. For the CVP, freedom of religion implied the right of Muslim women to choose whether or not to wear religious headscarves, as well as the right of anyone over the age of sixteen to adhere or not adhere to any religion. The CVP advocated banning fundamentalist imams from entering the country while establishing a faculty for Muslim theology at a Swiss university. The conservative Free Democratic Party (FDP) published a resolution maintaining that liberalism and democracy could be reconciled with the Islamic faith. The FDP advocated equal assessment of church towers and minarets by the same building codes and zoning restrictions. In March 2006, the right-populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) published a white paper on migration policy. The SVP paper stressed that the country's legal and customary norms applied to all and criticized government policy as too accommodating to minority requests. According to the SVP, foreigners increasingly abused the country's liberal order to engage in political agitation that undermined neutrality and exploited religious freedom by requesting special treatment, such as waivers for Muslim girls from swimming lessons in public schools.

In the Federal Parliament, the SVP, nominally the strongest faction, tabled two motions in December 2004 and February 2005, respectively, to abolish the Federal Commission against Racism and to erase the anti-racism clause from the Federal Penal Code, which criminalizes racist or anti-Semitic action or expression, whether in public speech or in printed material. Both motions have yet to be debated in Parliament.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, a local organization combating intolerance and xenophobia, the total number of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 103 in 2005, which was somewhat decreased from 108 incidents in 2004. These figures included instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

A 2004 study by the Zurich University found no evidence of anti-Semitism in the country's German language media, but noted that newspapers and electronic media often resorted to questionable stereotypes. The study also said that Muslims were more likely to be portrayed as aggressors or as opposed to democracy.

In April 2004, the Zurich lawyer and honorary chairman of the Jewish religious community, Sigi Feigel, sued the political party Europa Partei Schweiz, claiming that it sponsored newspaper advertisements comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. The party, which is not represented in Parliament, ran advertisements in the daily Tages-Anzeiger the day after the killing of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, calling on the Government to cut off diplomatic relations and end military cooperation with Israel. The advertisements referred to "Israel, nation of the Jews" and stated, "with the exception of the gas chambers, all the Nazi instruments are being used against (Israel's) resident population." In March 2006, a Zurich cantonal prosecutor, in agreement with the claimant parties, closed the case without bringing charges.

In May 2005, the Zurich cantonal appeals court acquitted the Jewish author of an anti-Islamist pamphlet from the charge of violating the anti-racism law on the grounds that in a political context even exaggerated criticism must be tolerated as long as it is not overtly racist.

On January 27, 2006, following the precedent of previous years, schools across the country held a day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. Education authorities said the aim was to remember the Holocaust and other forms of genocide committed in the past century and raise awareness of inhumane ideologies.

In October 2004, a forty-five-year-old African national entered the Islamic Center in Lausanne during Friday prayers and attacked the imam with a knife, seriously injuring him and a nearby worshiper in the stomach. The assailant had the knife taped to his hand and, in the ensuing scuffle, injured another six persons, including himself, before he could be controlled by bystanders and apprehended by the police. According to police, the assailant had escaped from a hospital where he was undergoing psychiatric evaluations. Vaud judicial authorities opened an investigation that remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were several reports of resident members of the Muslim community expressing concern about or alerting authorities to foreign imams giving radical speeches in mosques or local prayer rooms. In November 2004, a Muslim imam was asked to depart from Basel Canton for justifying some forms of domestic violence; he was also denounced by members of the local Muslim community. The former imam of the Islamic Center in Zurich, Youssef Ibram, stated that the storm of indignation following a November 2004 interview with a Swiss-French magazine, in which he refused to take an unequivocal stance against the stoning of adulterers, damaged his relations with the leadership of the community and left him no choice but to resign from his position. In April 2004, Swiss Muslims in Geneva complained that foreign imams invited to the Grand Mosque of Geneva for a prayer were giving radical speeches, sometimes filled with invectives against the Jewish population and western countries.

In June 2005, the local Association of Muslim Organizations in Zurich made public a charter adopted in March committing its fifteen member

societies to uphold the established legal order and democracy. The charter calls for the peaceful coexistence of and dialogue between different cultures and religions, rejects violence, and demands respect for human rights and equality. The charter calls for the integration of members of the Muslim communities with society and active engagement for the common good.

Efforts to set up a training program in the country for Muslim clerics and religious teachers were advanced in Basel, where cantonal authorities and the local university initiated the establishment of a chair for Muslim history and theology. In 2004, the university held exploratory talks with the Vienna-based Academy for Islamic Religious Education, but private financing for the chair has not yet been assured. Similar efforts to establish a chair for Muslim theology in other locations have failed or stalled, a fact that prompted the newly founded Center on Religion, Science, and Politics of the University of Zurich to launch a study to gauge the political climate regarding the training of Muslim clerics and Islamic religious education in public schools in the country. In November 2004, the Conference of Swiss Bishops and the Swiss Protestant Church Federation both publicly endorsed the idea that imams who lead prayers in Swiss mosques should be trained at Swiss universities; however, the Federal Council (cabinet) cautioned that the training for a specific profession was not a priority at the university level.

The Federal Office of Migration acknowledged that the training of imams posed a problem. Some cantons refused to grant a residency permit to imams considered fundamentalists. Many imams in the country came from Kosovo, Bosnia, the Middle East, and Maghreb countries. They were often either self-taught or trained in Muslim countries, the primary foreign country of training being Saudi Arabia. Officially, the country had two large mosques, in Geneva and Zurich, and approximately 120 prayer rooms. It was believed that another 100 prayer rooms existed, many of them belonging to Albanian, Turkish, or Arab communities. A new Federal Law on Foreigners, which Parliament adopted on December 16, 2005, provides for mandatory training of immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration into society. Among other provisions, the training program would ensure that immigrants can speak at least one of the three national languages (French, German, or Italian). The Federal Law on Foreigners was subject to a national referendum vote to be held on September 24, 2006.

While Muslim and Jewish cemeteries existed in the country, two laic cantons (Geneva and Neuchatel) require that all individuals from religious communities be buried in state-owned cemeteries only. Both Jewish and Muslim communities protested that this restriction breaches their freedom of religion and incurs higher costs. Islam prohibits Muslims from being buried in cemeteries belonging to other religions, and Geneva Muslims protested that they were forced to pay expensive repatriation costs to send their deceased by plane to a Muslim country. It was estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of deceased Muslims in Geneva were sent to their countries of origin for burial.

Other religious customs, such as genital mutilation of children, forced marriage, or the unilateral repudiation of marriage by the husband, are illegal. In May 2006, authorities in St. Gallen Canton reportedly deported both the husband and the father of a twenty-one-year-old resident Turkish woman who had been forced into marriage a year earlier in Turkey. The woman had notified police of receiving death threats when she refused to consummate the marriage after her husband had followed her to Switzerland. Both men were banned from reentering the country.

In 2004, Muslim leaders expressed fears of a "witch-hunt" following government revelations that members of half a dozen militant Muslim groups were operating secretly in the country. The Government later confirmed press allegations that these radical Islamic groups included the Tunisian Islamic Front, the Palestinian Hamas, and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front. The Government stated that it was being more sensitive in the wake of September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, but denied any systematic targeting of the country's Muslims.

There were no reports of difficulties for Muslims buying or renting space for worship, but some Islamic centers continued having difficulties accommodating the growing number of faithful attending Friday prayers. Although occasional complaints arose, such as a Muslim employee not being given time to pray during the workday, attitudes were generally tolerant toward Muslims. In one poll from November 2004, 76 percent of residents surveyed did not feel threatened by the presence of the 300,000-strong Muslim community living in the country, as opposed to 16 percent who did feel threatened; 61 percent favored a university chair to train Islamic imams in Switzerland; and 53 percent approved of female members of the Muslim community wearing the headscarf to work. In a separate survey of the Muslim community living in the country, 84 percent of the respondents said they felt accepted in the country, with 79 percent declaring that they have never experienced discrimination because of their religion.

However, a sociological study from 2005 found that a significant minority of the resident population holds anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic views. The study, which was part of the Swiss National Science Foundation's research program on right-wing extremism, consisted of a representative sample of more than 3,000 oral interviews probing for extremist beliefs and attitudes towards minorities. According to the study, almost one-quarter of respondents harbored anti-Semitic views or negative stereotypes, a fact that the authors partly explained as a consequence of the controversy over Switzerland's role during World War II. However, the study also established that the majority of anti-Semitic comments made in private occurred in the context of discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Muslim community was seen even more critically: 36 percent of respondents did not believe that Muslims in the country should order their lives in accordance with Islamic customs, and 30 percent of respondents considered it a humiliation for a Muslim woman to wear a headscarf. On the other hand, the study also found that 90 percent of respondents rejected right-wing extremism, and 85 percent approved of the criminal prosecution of racist propaganda.

A government-commissioned survey of thirty Muslim believers found that the resident Islamic community was very diverse. Coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, religious practices of the mostly immigrant community varied. Most Muslims had no problems practicing their religion, but only a small minority could be considered strict believers, according to the study. Many Muslims praised the country's integration policy, and a majority said they were influenced by Swiss culture. Some complained of discrimination or racism, particularly against women wearing religious headscarves.

The place of the Islamic headscarf in society was an issue of public debate. In October 2004, the country's biggest retailer made headlines when it became public that a request made in August by one of its female employees at a Zurich store to wear her headscarf to work had been put on hold. In November 2004, the retailer granted the request, stating that it would not impose a general ban but decide each case on

individual merits. The second biggest retailer, on the other hand, announced that its dress code did not provide for any headgear and that it would henceforth not allow the wearing of the headscarf. In Basel, the candidacy of a young woman in the October 2004 elections to the cantonal parliament who publicly affirmed her intention to continue to wear the headscarf if elected re-kindled the debate over the headscarf in public office. In November 2004, a local conservative party launched a popular initiative to ban all public sector employees or holders of public office from wearing the headscarf on duty. Federal Councilor Moritz Leuenberger publicly opposed an outright ban of the headscarf and warned that such a ban could hamper integration of Muslim women in society.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinated interfaith events throughout the country.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with government officials and representatives of the various faiths. Meetings have been held with Swiss Jewish leaders, a senior Muslim professor and community leader, Christian clergy, and human rights officials from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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