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2010 Report on International Religious Freedom - Turkey

[Covers the period from July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010]

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights.

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 government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups with significant restrictions placed on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious headscarves in government offices as well as public schools. Members of some religious groups said they were effectively blocked from careers in state institutions because of their faith. Minority religious groups also faced difficulties in freedom of worship, registration with the government, and the training of their followers and clergy. Although religious speech and persuasion was legal, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing or providing religious instruction to children.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Threats against non-Muslims created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Many Christians, Baha'is, and heterodox Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and some elements of society continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, mission representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups to discuss matters related to religious freedom, including legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 301,383 square miles and a population of 77.8 million. According to the government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Hanafi Sunni. According to representatives of various religious communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower.

In addition to the Sunni Muslim majority, academics estimate that there are between 15 million to 20 million Alevi, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religious groups indigenous to Anatolia. The government considered Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; some Alevi and Sunni maintained that Alevi were not Muslims.

There are several other religious groups constituting less than 1 percent of the country's population, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 500,000 Shi'ite Alevi; 60,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians; 23,000 Jews; 20,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians; 10,000 Baha'is; 5,000 Yezidis; 3,600 Jehovah's Witnesses; 3,500 members of various other Protestant sects; and up to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians. There are also small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian, Nestorian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, Syriac Catholic, and Maronite Christians. Among these minority religious communities are a significant number of Iraqis, including 3,000 Chaldean Christians.

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; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The 1982 constitution establishes the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds.

Core institutions of the state, including the presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role of defending secularism throughout the country's history. In some cases elements of the state have opposed activities of the elected government on grounds that they threatened the secular state.

The penal code prohibits imams, priests, rabbis, or other religious leaders from "reproaching or vilifying" the government or the laws of the state while performing their duties. Violations were punishable by prison terms of one month to one year, or three months to two years if the crime involved inciting others to disobey the law.

There are legal restrictions against insulting a recognized religion, interfering with such a religious group's services, or defacing its property.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ramazan Bayram and Kurban Bayram.

The government does not recognize conscientious objection to military service, and those who opposed military service on religious grounds faced charges in civil court and prison time.

Registration with the government was not mandatory for religious groups; however, unregistered religious groups have no legal standing and can face greater harassment than registered groups. Organizations, including religious groups, have the opportunity to register as an association or a foundation, but not on religious grounds.

While both foundations and associations received equal protection by law, associations must be nonprofit by definition and can receive money only in the form of donations. A foundation has greater fiscal freedom and can earn income through companies to support the foundation. However, the process for becoming a foundation was substantially lengthier and more expensive. Parliament determined on an annual basis the minimum capital requirement for creating a foundation; in 2010 the minimum was set at approximately \$33,300 (50,000 lira).

There were several official categories of foundations, including minority religious community foundations, education foundations, and aid foundations. There were 161 religious community foundations, the vast majority of which existed during the Ottoman Empire and were grandfathered into the country's foundation system. Since 1936 religious groups cannot register as minority community foundations and gain the legal rights held by such foundations. New religious groups can apply to register as a "new foundation" (promoting aid or education, for example). To begin the process, applicants must pay a sum, determined by the General Directorate of Foundations (GDF), according to the extent of their planned activities. Applicants cannot limit the focus of their activities to one community; for example, Christians. Religious community foundations were the only religious groups that can own real estate, and therefore religious groups not registered as foundations cannot acquire real estate. A foundation of any category can be closed only by a court judgment, which provides some protection for religious community foundations.

For religious communities to become an association can take as little as three months with no capital requirement. A group must submit a registration application to the provincial governor's office and can immediately begin operating while waiting for confirmation from the governor's office that its bylaws are constitutional. Associations can be closed by court orders, and they have fewer legal rights and protections at the local level. Associations are bound by the civil code not to discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race. As a result, associations focused on support for one religious group were not permitted.

The GDF regulated activities of all religious groups and their affiliated property, including 74 Greek Orthodox foundations; 48 Armenian Orthodox foundations; and 12 Jewish foundations; as well as Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The GDF also regulated all charitable religious foundations, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and assessed whether the foundations were operating within the stated objectives of their organizational statute.

The government oversees Muslim religious facilities and extracurricular Qur'an courses through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet is responsible for regulating the operation of more than 77,500 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants.

The constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public primary and secondary schools, with content determined by the Ministry of National Education's Department of Religious Instruction. Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish religious foundations may operate schools under the supervision of the Education Ministry. The curricula of these schools included information unique to the cultures of the three groups. The ministry reportedly verified if the child's father or mother was a Turkish citizen from that minority community before the child may enroll. Other non-Muslim communities may not operate schools of their own.

The constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to reveal his or her religious beliefs. Although there is a space in which to list one's religious affiliation on national identity cards, citizens can choose not to include a religion on their cards. Many religious groups complained that by not including an identity or listing something other than Muslim, individuals were precluded from jobs in the state bureaucracy or government. On February 2, 2010, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that an Alevi Turk's rights were violated by the fact that his identity card included a space in which to identify his religious identity and suggested that removing this category of information from identity cards would be one way to address the violation. However, the government had not implemented changes to allow for this by the end of the reporting period.

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 government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups and significant restrictions on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." However, in state buildings, including universities, there are often mescits (small mosques), in which Muslims may pray.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats), banned officially since 1925, remained active and widespread. Some prominent citizens reportedly continued to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Muslim organizations.

Religious minorities reported difficulties opening, maintaining, and operating houses of worship. Under the law religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandated that only the government can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it cannot register a site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that did not own property recognized by the GDF, often took place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. While police and prosecutors did not take steps to prevent or prosecute such gatherings, landlords were hesitant to rent to groups without confirmation that they would not be harassed by the police.

There were reports that local officials harassed persons who converted from Islam to another religion when they sought to amend their identity cards. Some non-Muslims maintained that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposed them to discrimination and harassment.

Members of non-Muslim religious communities were exempted legally from compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools. The government claimed that the compulsory instruction covered the range of world religions, but religious groups asserted that the courses reflect Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine. A few groups, such as Protestants and Syriac Orthodox, faced difficulty obtaining exemptions from the compulsory instruction, particularly if their identification cards did not list a religion other than Islam.

Alevi children received the same compulsory religious education as all Muslim students, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. A 2007 ECHR decision allowed an Alevi parent to request that his daughter be exempted from her school's compulsory religious education. However, during the reporting period, Alevis had nearly 20 court cases pending against the Ministry of Education alleging discrimination. Materials on Alevism were added to the religious course curriculum after the ECHR decision, but many Alevis believed them to be inadequate and, in some cases, false.

No law explicitly prohibited religious speech or religious conversions; nevertheless, many prosecutors and police regarded religious speech and religious activism with suspicion. Christians and Baha'is engaging in religious advocacy were occasionally threatened or pressured by government and state officials. For example, Protestants distributing Bibles at a book fair in Kayseri in November 2009 reportedly faced pressure from local politicians to withdraw from the book fair and not to return in the future. If the advocates were foreigners, they were at times deported but generally were able to reenter the country. Antimissionary rhetoric remained in compulsory school textbooks, and police officers occasionally reported students who met with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

Religious groups generally faced administrative challenges when employing foreign religious personnel because there is no visa category for religious workers.

The state provided training for Sunni Muslim clerics; religious communities outside the Sunni Muslim mainstream have not found a suitable system to train leadership inside the

country within the current legal framework. Coreligionists from outside the country were permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including patriarchs and chief rabbis, must be citizens according to a mandate by the Istanbul Governate, in an arrangement dating to Ottoman times.

Authorities continued to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally did not interfere with their religious activities; however, significant restrictions were placed on the administration of the churches. The government previously maintained that only citizens can be members of the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod and participate in patriarchal elections, despite the Ecumenical Patriarch's appeal to allow non-Turkish prelates. Members of the Greek Orthodox community claimed that the legal restrictions particularly threatened the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, because the community was becoming too small to provide enough citizen prelate candidates to maintain the institution. By not formally responding, the government de facto permitted Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I's 2004 appointment of six noncitizen metropolitans to the Holy Synod, representing the first appointment of noncitizens to the body in the 80-year history of the country. Additionally, in 2010 Prime Minister Erdogan offered citizenship to noncitizen metropolitans who chose to apply for it. Approximately 25 metropolitans have submitted paperwork, but no government response was received by the end of the reporting period.

Government officials acknowledged that the 1923 Lausanne Treaty does not address the issue of the Patriarch's ecumenical status, although the government historically has not recognized the title of Ecumenical Patriarch. During an official visit to Athens in May 2010, Prime Minister Erdogan said that the government has "no issue with the title of ecumenical." In a March 2010 report, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) concluded that there are no grounds for the government to deny the Church's use of the term "ecumenicity," and that there are no "factual or legal" reasons for the government not to use it as well.

Some members of the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to campaign against what they labeled as Islamic fundamentalism. These groups viewed religious fundamentalism as a threat to the secular state. The National Security Council and the General Staff categorize religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety. Reports by local human rights organization Mazlum-Der, the media, and the military indicated that the military periodically dismissed religiously observant Muslims from military service. Such dismissals were based on behavior that military officials believed identified these individuals as fundamentalists and have included Muslim and Baha'i whose religious beliefs officials maintained could indicate disloyalty to the secular state.

According to the military, officers and noncommissioned officers were dismissed periodically for ignoring repeated warnings from superior officers for maintaining ties to what the military considered Islamic fundamentalist organizations. In August 2009 the military high council reported three dismissals and, after its December 2009 session, it reported two dismissals, all of which pertained to alleged Islamic fundamentalism. Mazlum-Der reported that this was the lowest figure in 10 years.

Authorities continued to enforce the long-standing ban on the wearing of headscarves by civil servants in public buildings and by students in universities, although some universities and government offices have unofficially allowed students and employees to wear headscarves openly. Women who wear headscarves have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers.

A few religious groups, such as the Baha'i and Alevi, were unable to state their religious affiliation on their national identity cards because their religion was not included among the possible options. Despite a 2006 regulation allowing persons to leave the religion section of their identity cards blank or change the religious designation by written application, the government continued to restrict applicants' choice of religion. Applicants must choose Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Religionless, Other, or blank as their religious affiliation.

The ECHR ruled on February 2, 2010, that allowing a citizen to leave the religious identity section blank was not enough to ensure religious freedom in response to a case brought by an Alevi man who wished to list "Alevi" as his religion. The ECHR suggested that omitting any reference to religion on national identity cards would be one way for the country to comply with the ruling.

Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and built cem houses (places of gathering), although these have no legal status as places of worship and were often referred to as "cultural centers." Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained that they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately 100 cem houses in the country, which was an insufficient number to meet their needs. Alevis also charged there was bias in the Diyanet, which did not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. The Diyanet budget was reserved for the majority Sunni community, covering the salaries of imams and other costs. The government does not pay for utilities in cem houses or other facilities not recognized by the government as places of worship, as it does for mosques affiliated with the Sunni majority. Some Alevi groups wanted cem houses brought under the authority of the Diyanet while others feared that such a step would bring too much government control over their religion.

The Caferis, the country's principal Shi'a community largely of Azeri-Iranian origin and concentrated mostly in the east and in Istanbul, were permitted to build and operate their own mosques and appoint their own imams. As with the Alevis, their places of worship had no legal status and received no financial support from the Diyanet. However, Diyanet does not appoint imams to these places of worship, leaving the community to select their own unofficial leaders. In a March 2010 meeting, Caferi leaders met with officials from the Diyanet to present a number of requests, including receiving financial support from the government for their own places of worship, as well as the right to set their own budgets and to offer religious education to their coreligionists.

The law established eight years of compulsory secular education, after which students may pursue studies at general state schools or vocational high schools, which include imam hatip (Muslim preacher) high schools. Graduates of vocational schools, as well as general state schools, faced an automatic minimal reduction in their university entrance examination grades if they applied for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction made it more difficult for imam hatip graduates to enroll in university programs other than theology. Most families that enrolled their children in imam hatip schools did so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams. Students were permitted to enroll in summer Qur'an classes provided by the Diyanet after completing the fifth grade (about age 11). Individuals who have completed the eighth grade or reached 16 years of age can attend yearlong Qur'an courses provided by the Diyanet. Unofficial Qur'an courses also existed outside the Diyanet's control.

The government interpreted the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognized groups-- Armenian Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians-- although the treaty text referred broadly to "non-Muslim minorities" without listing specific groups. Since this recognition does not extend to the religious leadership organs, the administrations of these religious communities do not have legal personality. The Armenian Orthodox and Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarchates continued to seek legal recognition of their status as patriarchates rather than a conglomeration of different community foundations. Without legal personality they do not have the right to own and transfer property. Additionally, because the government requires all places of learning to be under the control of the Education Ministry, the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates chose not to train their clerics in the country. In March 2010 the Venice Commission determined that, according to the case law that has emerged from the ECHR, there is no legal basis for the government to deny non-Muslim religious communities a path to obtaining legal personality.

In 1974 the High Court of Appeals ruled that minority foundations had no right to acquire

properties beyond those listed in their 1936 declarations, and the state seized control of properties acquired after 1936. An amended foundations law governing religious minority property rights, which became effective in February 2008, facilitates the return of minority foundation properties expropriated as a result of the 1974 ruling; however, the law did not account for properties that have been sold to third parties or to those expropriated when the associated foundations were taken under government control. Due to the Greek community's small population, this applied to the majority of expropriated Greek Orthodox properties, as the foundations that oversaw the properties became defunct due to lack of personnel. The law also does not rescind the authority of the GDF to expropriate property. Officials claimed that the amended foundations law should make it easier for non-Muslim communities to manage and establish new foundations. In June 2010 the Constitutional Court upheld the provisions of the foundation law that concern religious community foundations in response to an opposition party's appeal.

The amended law allowed the 161 non-Muslim religious foundations recognized by the GDF to acquire property, but it does not allow the communities to reclaim all of the properties affiliated with foundations expropriated by the state over the years, nor can the communities claim rights to property acquired prior to 1936 but not included on the list. After the foundations law went into effect in February 2008, foundations had the opportunity to submit applications requesting registration of new properties and claiming some old properties. Foundations submitted 1,410 applications in the first wave, which remained open until August 2009. Of those claims 96 were approved, whereas the rest were rejected or postponed pending receipt of further supporting documents.

Non-Muslim communities complained that implementing the regulations of the foundations law has led to interference in the elections of foundation boards, the treatment of charitable community foundations as business corporations for tax purposes, the freezing of revenue from real estate transactions, and a ban on transferring surplus income from one foundation to another. According to the amended law, religious community foundations can receive financial grants from individuals and institutions domestically or internationally and can provide such grants to similar foundations and associations either in or outside the country.

The Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul continued to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary was closed in 1971 after the Patriarchate chose not to comply with a state requirement to nationalize to avoid the seminary being administered by the state.

Restoration or construction may be carried out on buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board on the protection of cultural and national wealth. In the past bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation impeded repairs to religious facilities.

In January 2008 the Undersecretariat of the Treasury initiated a case against the monastery in Midyat to claim ownership of 12 parcels of land inside and outside the monastery walls. The Midyat court decided in favor of the monastery in June 2009. The Treasury's appeal to the Supreme Court was sent back to the Midyat court for more information. In June 2009 the monastery lost a court case brought against it by the Department of Forestry that claimed ownership of 68 acres of land inside the monastery walls, and 15 acres adjacent to the outer wall. In its defense the monastery presented tax records for the property dating to 1937 as well as ownership documents dating to 1935.

An appeal by three village muhtars (the lowest level elected official with no political affiliation and limited local authority) in Midyat was pending following a lower court's ruling in May 2009 in favor of the monastery. In September 2008 a court upheld the results of a May 2008 cadastral regional land survey that reclaimed all but 30 percent of the monastery's land. The same month, three village muhtars in Midyat filed a criminal complaint against the monastery alleging it illegally appropriated territory by building a

wall. A court ruled in favor of the monastery in May 2009. Official papers from the 1950s documented the provincial administrative board's approval of the monastery's borders. The monastery did not have legal status and was represented by a foundation established during the Ottoman Empire.

In July 2008 the ECHR ruled that the country violated the Ecumenical Patriarchate's property rights to a former orphanage on Buyukada Island. In June 2010 the ECHR ruled that the orphanage must be returned to the patriarchate. The legal method of returning the property was being determined at the end of the reporting period, since the patriarchate does not have a legal personality and therefore cannot own property.

Religious groups lost numerous properties to the state in the past and continued to fight ongoing efforts by the state to expropriate properties. In many cases the government had taken control of non-Muslim religious foundations and expropriated associated properties on the grounds that the foundations were not operating in accordance with their charters or that the non-Muslim communities they supported had insufficient populations to sustain the foundations. Such expropriations were frequently appealed to the Danistay (Council of State) and, if unsuccessful at that level, to the ECHR. Many religious groups experienced problems operating places of worship due to laws governing foundations.

On October 6, 2009, the ECHR ruled that the government violated the freedom of assembly of a Protestant congregation in Ankara that had petitioned to form a foundation in 2000. The ECHR awarded \$3,600 (2,500 euros) to each congregation member and \$7,490 (5,200 euros) to the group as a whole. The congregation registered as a charitable association while its court case proceeded, and it had not changed its registration to a foundation by the end of the reporting period.

In February 2009 the ECHR ruled that a Protestant church in Izmir had the right to legal status as an association and the government complied with the ruling. Another case filed at the same time by a member of the Protestant Association of Turkey involving a complaint regarding the zoning of property as a place of worship was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Many local officials continued to impose standards on churches, such as minimum space requirements, that are not imposed on mosques. In numerous incidents the Protestant community faced the requirement of having to purchase 27,000 square feet of land in order to construct a church, no matter the size of the congregation. Protestant representatives also faced severe difficulty in receiving the legally required municipal approval to build churches in centrally located areas due to restrictive zoning laws.

In December 2009 the Danistay rejected a petition by the Jehovah's Witnesses community to overturn the closure of one of their Kingdom Halls (places of worship). The community then took the case to the ECHR, and the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Due to the Jehovah's Witnesses' stance as conscientious objectors to military service, members continued to face difficulties. According to Jehovah's Witnesses officials, at the end of the reporting period, 21 members faced prosecution and fines for their refusal to serve in the military in accordance with their beliefs. One objector, Baris Gormez, had been charged six times for "disobedience of orders" and had been in prison since 2007. The Jehovah's Witness community had three applications regarding conscientious objection pending acceptance by the ECHR at the end of the reporting period. The ECHR was processing two other cases of conscientious objectors at the end of the reporting period.

Another conscientious objector, Enver Aydemir, refused to perform military service based on his Islamic beliefs and has faced periodic detention since 2007. He was re-arrested in December 2009, but was released in June 2010 after receiving a psychiatric

evaluation that diagnosed him with an "antisocial personality."

A foreign citizen performing missionary work and his family were deported in June 2010 and charged by the Ministry of Interior with threatening public order and national security. On May 20, 2010, the ECHR ruled that the rights of another foreign citizen were violated when she was deported from the country repeatedly in the 1980s for missionary activities seen as a threat to national security. The government was ordered to pay a fine of \$15,320 (12,000 euros) in compensation.

Court proceedings continued in the 2006 case against two Muslim converts to Christianity charged with "insulting Turkishness," in violation of article 301 of the penal code, inciting hatred against Islam, and secretly compiling data on private citizens for a Bible correspondence course.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Improvements and Positive Development in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the government took steps to recognize and address the concerns of the Alevi population. The government held quarterly Alevi workshops aimed at addressing the concerns of the Alevi population. Some Alevi groups complained that these workshops did not address the needs of all Alevi groups, just those alleged to be close to the government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, and practice. Threats against non-Muslims during the reporting period created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Religious pluralism was widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." Muslims, Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and members of other religious communities faced societal suspicion and mistrust.

The trial of five suspects involved in the 2007 alleged torture and killing of three members of a Protestant church in Malatya continued at the close of the reporting period. The court denied a request to connect to the case to the Ergenekon indictment on February 19, 2010.

On June 3, 2010, Bishop Luigi Padovese, a Roman Catholic bishop who was the apostolic vicar for Anatolia, was killed in his official residence in Iskenderun. His driver was arrested in connection with the attack. At the end of the reporting period, the police and Italian and Vatican authorities concluded that the killing was not religiously motivated.

Nationalist sentiments sometimes contained anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones. In September 2009 a Protestant community leader, Zekai Tanyar, complained to the Ministry of Education that junior high school history books described the activities of Christian missionaries in the early 20th century as "criminal." In response to his complaint, in October 2009 the ministry changed the description to "separatist." The Minister for European Union Affairs pledged to use the phrase "different faith groups" to describe the country's smaller religious communities. He previously used the term "non-Muslim," which Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Yusuf Cetin claimed was better translated as "non-believers."

Jewish leaders in the country believed the occurrences of anti-Semitism were directly related to events in the Middle East. However, Jewish community members reported that they did not feel they were held responsible for these events by most of the public. After the Free Gaza flotilla incidents of May 2010, government leaders at all levels

emphasized through public speeches that Turkish Jews were distinct from both Israeli citizens and the Israeli government, and they asserted that the country's Jews should be protected. Jewish community leaders noted that after the event they received extra police protection, which prevented a few acts of vandalism against community property. In June 2010 a citizen was arrested on charges of planning the assassination of rabbis. Although he stated that he "hated Jews" personally, he denied the accusation of planning the killings.

A variety of newspapers and television shows continued to feature anti-Christian and anti-Jewish messages, and anti-Semitic literature was common in bookstores. In October the state-run television channel began broadcasting the series "Ayrilik" ("Separation"), in which Israeli soldiers were portrayed murdering children in the Palestinian territories. A trailer of the series was also advertised in metro stations in Istanbul. After complaints the government worked with the producers of the series to remove the offensive content.

Several Protestant pastors, some church legal advisors, and several churches across the country received heightened police protection due to threats. On December 4, 2009, three men confronted the priest of a Syriac Orthodox church in southern Turkey and threatened to kill him if he did not destroy the church bell tower. The threat was made in response to a November 29 Swiss referendum in favor of banning the construction of new minarets in Switzerland. The priest reported the incident to the police who then apprehended the suspects. The priest chose not to press charges against them.

In August 2009 a citizen attacked a Christian Turk in Istanbul, holding him at knifepoint on a city street and threatening his life while accusing him of being a missionary who threatened the integrity of the nation. He was convicted in February 2010 in a local court of making death threats and mounting an armed attack, a verdict that normally carries a sentence of four years in prison. The judge sentenced him only to time served and ordered him released from prison.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador, the consul general in Istanbul, and the consul in Adana, as well as staffs of all three posts, maintained close relations with the religious leadership of the Muslim majority as well as other religious groups. The ambassador and other officials continued to urge the government to permit the reopening of Halki seminary on Heybeli Island and restore the expropriated property of non-Muslim communities.

The ambassador regularly discussed government policy regarding Muslim and other religious groups, as well as specific cases of religious discrimination and other topics concerning religious freedom in private meetings with cabinet members. Other mission officers held high-level meetings with government officials to discuss these issues.
