

FRANCE 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice religion. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner announced that since 2018 authorities had closed 159 institutions open to the public, including 13 places of worship, to combat Islamism and secluded communities. President Emmanuel Macron and other government officials again condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts, and the government augmented from 7,000 to 10,000 the number of security forces it deployed to protect religious and other sensitive sites. President Macron publicly stated anti-Semitism had grown and reached its worst level since World War II. He called anti-Zionism a modern form of anti-Semitism and said it was why the government would implement the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. The National Assembly separately passed a resolution adopting the IHRA definition. Interior Minister Castaner and Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet announced additional measures to combat anti-Semitism, including enhanced security for religious sites and improved guidance for prosecutors evaluating hate crimes. As part of the 2018-2020 national plan to combat racism and anti-Semitism, the government awarded the first annual national anti-racism prize and dedicated 2.3 million euros (\$2.58 million) for local projects on the issue. The government continued to enforce a ban on full-face coverings in public and the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols in public schools and by officials offering public services. Police in Grenoble fined female Muslim protesters for bathing in burkinis in a public swimming pool. An assemblyman in Dijon turned away a Muslim woman accompanying her son to the regional legislature for refusing to remove her hijab. Interior Minister Castaner included "rigid religious practice, particularly exacerbated in Ramadan," and "regular and ostentatious practice of ritual prayer" in a list of possible indicators of Islamist radicalization. The minister of the armed forces acknowledged government responsibility for the 1942 roundup of 13,000 French Jews deported to extermination camps.

Religiously motivated crimes included attempted murder, assault, threats, hate speech, discrimination, and vandalism. The government reported 1,052 anti-Christian incidents, most of which involved vandalism or arson of churches and cemeteries, compared with 1,063 in 2018; 154 incidents targeting Muslims, including attempted murder, compared with 100 in 2018; and 687 anti-Semitic incidents, including a violent assault against a Jewish taxi driver, death threats

against a mayor, harassment of a prominent Jewish philosopher, and desecration of Jewish cemeteries, an increase of 27 percent compared with the 541 incidents recorded in 2018. The rise in anti-Semitic incidents stemmed from a 50 percent increase in threats; other incidents, including attacks on persons – which fell by 44 percent – declined by 15 percent. Authorities charged a man with attempted murder for shooting outside a mosque two persons who caught him as he tried to set fire to the mosque. A court ruled the confessed killer of a Jewish woman in 2017 could not be held criminally responsible because he was in a delusional state from smoking marijuana before the killing. Lawyers for the family announced their intention to appeal the ruling. A Paris court of appeals convicted Abdelkader Merah of complicity in the 2012 killings by his brother of seven persons outside a Jewish school. A study found 42 percent of Muslims reported experiencing religious discrimination at least once in the previous five years. A European Commission (EC) survey found 72 percent of respondents thought anti-Semitism was a problem in the country and another EC survey found 69 percent believed religious discrimination was widespread. A sports retailer cancelled plans to sell a hijab for runners after widespread criticism of the measure.

The U.S. embassy, consulates general, and American Presence Posts (APPs) discussed religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in combating violent extremism, and cooperation on these issues with officials at the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the Interministerial Delegation to Fight Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hate (DILCRAH). The Ambassador and embassy, consulate, and APP officials met regularly with religious communities and their leaders throughout the country to discuss religious freedom concerns and encourage interfaith cooperation and tolerance. The embassy sponsored projects and events to combat religious discrimination and religiously-motivated hate crimes. The embassy sponsored the participation of interfaith representatives in a U.S. program with themes of religious cooperation and pluralism. It also funded religious tolerance workshops for youths led jointly by Jewish and Muslim organizations in Bordeaux.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 67.6 million (midyear 2019 estimate). The law prohibits government collection of data based on race, ethnicity, or religion. However, a wide range of unofficial statistics and studies circulate.

A report released in July by the Observatory for Secularism, a government-appointed commission, in cooperation with polling company Viavoice, presented estimated figures of those who identified as part of a religion or felt tied to a religion. According to the report, whose figures are consistent with other estimates, 48 percent of respondents identify as Catholic, 3 percent Muslim, 3 percent Protestant, 2 percent Buddhist, 0.7 percent Jewish, 0.6 percent, and 1 percent other religion; 34 percent said they have no religious affiliation and 7 percent preferred not to respond. The same report estimates “other” religions’ numbers as follows: Jehovah’s Witnesses, 140,000-250,000, and Hindus, 150,000-300,000. In addition, the observatory’s report stated 31 percent consider themselves nonbelievers or atheists.

The report stated the number of residents linked to Islam in the poll was likely underestimated, as some Muslim and Muslim-affiliated residents may have declined to state their religion. According to the report, the “most precise” estimate of the Muslim population, based on multiple polls and demographic extrapolation, is likely between 3.3 and 5.0 million residents. The report stated the Muslim population corresponds with the arrival of immigrant populations, particularly from the Mediterranean and West Africa. The report also tied Hindu and Buddhist populations to immigrant communities.

The report attributes the growth in the Protestant community, from 2.5 percent of the population in 2010 to 3.1 percent during the year, to the growing number of Evangelical Christians, who number approximately one million.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular republic and states it “shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law,” regardless of religion, and shall respect all beliefs. The law provides for the separation of religion and state and guarantees the free exercise of religious worship except to maintain public order.

The law, as well as international and European covenants to which the country adheres, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of 1,500 euros (\$1,700) and imprisonment of one month. Individuals who are defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of any law they say impedes their freedom of religion.

Laws increase the penalties for acts of violence or defamation when they are committed because of the victim's actual or perceived membership or nonmembership in a given religious group. Additional penalties beyond those for the underlying crime for acts of violence that courts determine are religiously motivated are three to five years' imprisonment and fines of 45,000 to 75,000 euros (\$50,600-\$84,300), depending on the severity of the victims' injuries. For religiously motivated acts of public defamation, defined as an allegation of fact that affects the honor of a person or body, the penalties are one year's imprisonment and/or a fine of 45,000 euros (\$50,600). The government may expel noncitizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

Although the law does not require it, religious groups may apply for official recognition and tax-exempt status. Religious groups may register under two categories: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organize only religious activities. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in for-profit as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories. For example, Catholics perform religious activities through their associations of worship and operate schools through their cultural associations.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture (the administrative body representing the central government in each department) for recognition as an association of worship and tax-exempt status. In order to qualify as an association of worship, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include liturgical services and practices, religious training, and the construction of buildings serving the religious group. The association must also engage in public worship and respect public order. Among excluded activities are those that are purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. To apply for this tax-exempt status, the association must provide to the prefecture its estimated budget for the year, annual accounts for the previous three years or since the association's creation, whichever is shorter, a written justification of eligibility for the status, and the number of members of the association. In Paris, the association must have a minimum of 25 members. Once granted, the association may use the tax-exempt status nationwide. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in

conformity with its tax-exempt status, however, the government may change that status and require the association to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to the Ministry of Interior (MOI), 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witness, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status. The number of cultural associations, many of which are not associated with religious groups, is in the thousands and changes frequently. Cultural associations may be declared using an online form through the government's public administration website. Cultural associations, even if associated with religious groups, may operate without applying for government recognition.

The law states, "Detained persons have the right to freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion. They may practice the religion of their choice...without other limits than those imposed by the security needs and good order of the institution."

Counterterrorism legislation grants prefects in each department the authority to close a place of worship for a maximum of six months if they find comments, writings, or activities in the place of worship "provoke violence, hatred or discrimination or the commission of acts of terrorism or praise such acts of terrorism." The management of the place of worship has 48 hours to appeal the closure decision to an administrative court. Noncompliance with a closure decision carries a six-month prison sentence and a fine of 7,500 euros (\$8,400). The core provisions of the legislation will expire at the end of 2020 unless renewed by parliament.

The law prohibits covering one's face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces, such as restaurants and movie theaters. If police encounter a person in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they are legally required to ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. According to the law, police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. Police may not question or hold an individual for more than four hours. Refusing a police instruction to remove a face-covering garment carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$170) or attendance at a citizenship course. Individuals who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority are subject to a fine of up to 30,000 euros (\$33,700) and may receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the person coerced is a minor.

The law prohibits agents of the administration, public services, and companies or associations carrying out public services from demonstrating their religion through visible signs of religious affiliation, such as the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, or Christian cross. The prohibition applies during working hours and at the place of employment.

By law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new places of worship. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. The law also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The state owns and is responsible for the upkeep of most places of worship, primarily Catholic, built before 1905. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

The law separating religion and state does not apply in three classes of territories. Because Alsace-Lorraine (currently comprising the departments of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and la Moselle and known as Alsace-Moselle) was part of Germany when the law was enacted, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Pastors, priests, and rabbis of these four recognized faiths in Alsace-Moselle receive a salary from the interior ministry, and the country's president, with the agreement of the Holy See, appoints the Catholic bishops of Metz and Strasbourg. The prime minister appoints the chief rabbi and the presidents of the Jewish and Protestant consistories in Alsace-Moselle, and the interior minister appoints ministers of the three Christian churches in the region. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. The overseas department of French Guiana, which is governed under 19th century colonial laws, may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Other overseas departments and overseas territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This provision also applies to the portion of Antarctica the government claims as an overseas territory.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees from wearing visible signs of religious affiliation and students from wearing "conspicuous religious symbols," including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Public schools do not provide religious instruction except in Alsace-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. In Alsace-Moselle, religious education regarding one of the four recognized faiths is compulsory in public primary and secondary schools, although students may opt

for a secular equivalent with a written request from their parents. Religious education classes are taught by laypersons who are trained and nominated by the respective religious groups but are paid by the state. Elsewhere in the country, public schools teach information about religious groups as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear conspicuous religious symbols or to receive religious instruction may homeschool or send their children to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools.

By law, the government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. In 98 percent of private schools, in accordance with the law, the government pays the teachers' salaries, provided the school accepts all children regardless of their religious affiliation. The law does not address the issue of religious instruction in government-subsidized private schools or whether students must be allowed to opt out of such instruction.

Missionaries from countries not exempt from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before traveling to the country. All missionaries from non-exempt countries wishing to remain longer than 90 days must obtain long-duration visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must provide a letter from their sponsoring religious group to apply to the local prefecture for a temporary residence card.

The law criminalizes the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, treating it as “a provocation to discrimination or hatred or violence towards a person or a group of persons because of their origin or belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race, or a determined religion.”

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On November 28, at a conference of the country's prefects, Interior Minister Castaner announced the nationwide expansion of an initial program authorities had implemented since February 2018 to counter “Islamism and communitarianism,” the latter term referencing, according to the Observatory for Secularism, a trend for community withdrawal and separation from the rest of society, up to and including enforcement of rules specific to that community. The initial project targeted 15 communities “particularly touched by the phenomenon of political Islam,” according to Secretary of State to the Minister of the Interior Laurent Nunez in a

November 15 interview. In these communities, the MOI had conducted 1,030 inspections of establishments open to the public, including pubs, cafes, and liquor stores; cultural and sports establishments; private schools; and places of worship. As a result of the inspections, during that period the MOI closed 133 drinking establishments, 13 places of worship, four schools, and nine cultural establishments because, according to Nunez in his interview, those establishments employed a “communitarian” or “political Islam” discourse that put “the laws of God before the laws of the Republic.” The government did not identify the specific sites it closed under the initial program.

The prefect of Isere, who is subordinate to the minister of interior, closed the Al-Kawthar Mosque in Grenoble for six months starting February 7. The MOI stated it closed the mosque because it posted videos on its YouTube channel that incited hatred and violence towards Christians and Jews; its imam’s sermons justified armed jihad; and the mosque was frequented by known extremists. There were no reports the mosque reopened after the six-month period. The government said it closed one other mosque and monitored 63 mosques during the year but did not identify them or provide other details. On June 13, the association Action Muslim Rights (ADM) released a report criticizing the MOI’s closures of mosques. ADM stated that while the mosques were shut down, the government did not investigate them for terrorist ties. According to the report, none of the mosques had reopened, although the law limits the closures to a period not to exceed six months.

Between January 1 and July 18, the interior ministry expelled 44 foreigners it considered radicalized, a new record, *Le Point* magazine reported. While the article did not cite 2018 deportations, it reported that in 2017 the country deported a total of 20 radicalized foreigners. (A 2018 report the country had expelled 300 radical imams since 2017 was incorrect.)

On October 8, as President Macron paid tribute to four victims of an insider knife attack at the Paris police headquarters, he stated the country must develop a “society of vigilance” in which citizens look out for signs of individuals being influenced by Islamist extremist networks in the fight against the “hydra” of Islamist militancy. The attacker, a police employee who had converted to Islam, had contacts with individuals believed to be linked to an Islamist Salafist movement, according to prosecutors, who also said they believed the attacker harbored work-related grievances linked to his disabilities.

In response to the same knife attack, Interior Minister Castaner spoke before the National Assembly October 8 and articulated several signs that might indicate a

person's radicalization through changes in behavior, including "rigorous religious practice, particularly exacerbated during the period of Ramadan," "wearing a beard," whether or not he greets a woman with a traditional kiss on the cheek, if the person "has a regular and ostentatious practice of ritual prayer," and the presence of hyperpigmentation on the forehead, widely interpreted as a reference to the *zabiba*, a mark often resulting from repeated contact of the forehead with a prayer rug.

The government maintained the deployment of security forces throughout the country to protect sensitive sites, including vulnerable Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim sites and other places of worship, and increased their number from 7,000 to 10,000. After the March terrorist attacks against mosques in New Zealand, the MOI increased patrols around religious sites.

At year's end, the Paris Appeals Court had not issued a ruling in the case of Lebanese-Canadian academic Hassan Diab, who was charged with bombing a synagogue in Paris during Sabbath prayers in 1980, killing four and injuring 40. In 2018 investigating magistrates dismissed the court case against Diab and ordered his release. Prosecutors appealed the case's dismissal, and the Paris Appeals Court requested additional expert testimony before ruling. Upon his release in 2018, Diab returned to Canada where he remained at year's end.

In June police fined a group of Muslim women 35 euros (\$39) each for bathing in burkinis at a municipal swimming pool in Grenoble in protest of local regulations banning the garment. Women from the same association reported the Citizen Alliance of Grenoble had carried out a similar protest "Operation Burkini" in May, which they called an "act of civil disobedience." One of the women told the BBC they were being deprived of their civil rights and that "We must fight against discriminatory policies and prejudice in France..." Prime Minister Edouard Philippe expressed support for the mayor of Grenoble and the regulations, saying, "No citizen can be released from the respect of the law or the common regulation on the basis of his religious convictions." Marlene Schiappa, Junior Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination, said, "There is a political message" behind the burkini, which is: "cover up." She added, however, "Women, whatever their religion or their way of life, must be able to access municipal swimming pools." In 2016 the Council of State, the country's highest court on administrative matters, overturned several burkini bans on the basis that local authorities could only restrict individual liberties if there was a "proven risk" to public order. The court ruling did not overturn other anti-burkini regulations nor did it make them illegal; other anti-burkini regulations thus remained in force.

unless mayors or prefectures suspended them. The ruling did, however, set a legal precedent upon which persons could contest those regulations.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported three cases in which authorities had interfered with proselytizing during the year. They did not provide additional details on the incidents.

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of August 2017, the latest year for which statistics were available, the penitentiary system employed the following number of chaplains: 695 Catholic, 347 Protestant, 224 Muslim, 76 Jewish, 54 Orthodox Christian, 170 Jehovah's Witness, and 19 Buddhist. In detainee visiting areas, visitors could bring religious objects to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues but could not pray. Prisoners could pray in their cells individually, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments where they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

At year's end, the government did not respond to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) following the latter's October 2018 finding that French authorities violated the human rights of two women by fining them for wearing *niqabs* in two separate cases in 2012. The UNHRC gave the government a deadline of 180 days to report to it action taken to respond to the violation and prevent other such violations. According to a statement the government issued on the same day as the UNHRC ruling, the law prohibiting concealment of the face in public spaces was legitimate and did not infringe upon freedom of religion. The government added it would convey its views to the UNHRC in a follow-on report.

During an October 11 meeting of the Burgundy-Franche-Comte Regional Assembly in the central-eastern part of the country, Julien Odoul, an elected official representing the National Rally (RN) Party, told a woman who was accompanying her son on a school outing to the legislature to remove her hijab or leave. The law does not prohibit women from wearing hijabs while attending an assembly session. In response, Junior Minister Schiappa said that "it is by publicly humiliating mothers in front of their children that we create divisions" in society. Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer, however, said, "The law does not prohibit veiled women from accompanying children, but we do not wish to encourage the phenomenon," which is "not in agreement with our values." Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire stated the veil "is legal, but not necessarily desirable." The woman filed one legal complaint against Odoul with the Dijon public prosecutor's office for violence of a racial nature by persons of authority, and a separate legal complaint with the Paris prosecutor's office for

“incitement of racial hatred by elected officials.” The complaints were pending at year’s end.

In April the Ministry of Culture created a five-person Mission for Research and Restitution of Spoliated Cultural Property in April to seek out the rightful owners or heirs of artworks, including those in museums and galleries, stolen or sold under duress during the country’s occupation. In the spring the government transferred authority for final decisions on art restitution claims from the Ministry of Culture to the Commission for the Compensation for Victims of Spoliation, a separate administrative body reporting directly to the prime minister, in order to address criticism that museum officials would be reluctant to hand over valuable artwork. On April 1, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian attended a ceremony returning artwork to its pre-WWII owners at the French consulate in New York.

The government continued to implement a 2018-2020 national plan to combat racism and anti-Semitism in the country, with a strong focus on countering online hate content. As part of the plan, Prime Minister Philippe awarded the first annual national anti-racism prize, named for Ilan Halimi, a young Jewish man tortured and killed in 2006. In October DILCRAH dedicated 2.3 million euros (\$2.58 million) and announced a call for local projects addressing education, prevention, training, and aid for victims of racism and anti-Semitism. The government also continued with an initiative for European Union legislation to require faster removal of illegal content online; created a national reaction team to improve education countering racist and anti-Semitic behavior; funded two thesis grants annually to finance work on racism and anti-Semitism; and established an online precomplaint system for victims of discrimination or racist or anti-Semitic acts.

Prime Minister Philippe advocated for a bill requiring websites to remove “obviously hateful” content, specifically racist or anti-Semitic content, within 24 hours. Deputy Laetitia Avia introduced the draft bill at the direction of Prime Minister Philippe and as part of the 2018-2020 national plan to combat racism and anti-Semitism. The National Assembly passed the bill in July, but the senate did not vote on it by year’s end. Among other critiques on freedom of expression grounds, the European Commission published a letter November 22 raising concerns about the bill’s impact on freedom of expression and its potential conflict with European Union free speech directives. Facebook and others questioned the 24-hour window to remove content, citing the legal analysis needed to evaluate posts.

On April 2, Minister of Justice Nicole Belloubet introduced a circular, which she said was part of the effort to combat anti-Semitism, urging prosecutors to use simplified, faster procedures (such as civil referrals to block access to “hate sites”) and criminal orders (trial without a hearing) to prosecute and convict authors of “racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic” writings.

In a September 12 speech before the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF) in Bordeaux, Interior Minister Castaner detailed several government measures to fight what he called “the poison of anti-Semitism,” including enhanced surveillance of 800 places of worship, the dissolution by decree of the Council of Ministers of several neo-Nazi groups, including Bastion Social and six affiliated associations, Combat 18, and Blood and Honor Hexagon, and an increase in the government contribution for the Shoah Memorial. He repeated President Macron’s February statement that the National Assembly would take up a proposal to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, and said, “Anti-Zionism often has nothing to do with criticism of the foreign policy of the State of Israel; it is too often aimed at people of Jewish faith. It has become a disguised anti-Semitism.”

On July 10, the Observatory for Secularism, a body composed of 15 senior civil servants, parliamentarians, legal experts, and intellectuals who advise the government on the implementation of the “principle of secularism,” released its sixth annual report evaluating secularism in schools, public spaces, and hospitals. According to the report, the subject of secularism remained a sensitive one, although “direct attacks on secularism” appeared better contained, for the third year in a row. The report credited a proliferation of training on secularism and treatment of religious subjects, as well as improved targeting of implementing partners for the training. Since 2013, the Observatory for Secularism said it had directly or indirectly contributed to training more than 250,000 persons to respond to questions of secularism in the workplace.

On April 14, a fire broke out at the Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, destroying the roof and spire and causing extensive damage to the windows and vaulted ceilings. President Macron, Prime Minister Philippe, and Secretary of State to the Minister of the Interior Nunez visited the cathedral, which is government-owned, while the fire still burned. Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said in a statement June 26 that a preliminary investigation found no signs the blaze was started deliberately, and that it was likely due to negligence. Macron vowed in a televised address on April 16 that the country would rebuild the cathedral in five years.

Interior Minister Castaner did not attend the iftar hosted by the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), but attended an iftar in Strasbourg hosted by the Alsace Regional Council of Muslim Faith (Alsace CRCM) on May 29. At that event, Castaner, whose ministry oversees government relations with religious communities, expressed his disappointment with CFCM for its “reluctant” approach to implementing reforms. He praised the Alsace CRCM, however, as a “laboratory of ideas for the future of Islam in France.” He lauded the “peaceful and constructive approach” of the Alsace CRCM, specifically its work on prevention of radicalization, creation of a council of imams and religious leaders, and interreligious dialogue. Attendees at the event included regional Muslim community leaders, interfaith leaders, other government officials, and the mayor of Strasbourg.

Interior Minister Castaner continued a nationwide consultation process with the Muslim community to reform the structure and the funding of Islam in the country. In his New Year’s address to CFCM at the Grand Mosque of Paris on January 23, he called for “powerful representatives” of Islam in the country, and stated, referencing the recurring “Yellow Vest” cost of living protests in the country, that he counted on Muslim leaders “to influence public debates including on nonreligious issues such as the protests”. “Islam,” he said, “like every organized religion, has its place in France. There is no incompatibility between praying to Allah and loving the Republic.” In December prefects in each department held a second round of listening sessions with local representatives from the Muslim community on issues related to institutional representation, financing of Islamic places of worship, and training of imams.

On October 28, President Macron met with Muslim leaders of the CFCM and called on them to fight Islamism and “communitarianism,” which he called a form of “separatism” in the country. He urged the CFCM to adopt clear position on issues including public wearing of the veil, women’s roles, and education in the Muslim community.

On August 29, President Macron met with the newly elected President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of France, Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, to discuss reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral, migration, relations between religions and the state, and proposed legislation on access to medically-assisted reproduction treatments. Archbishop Moulins-Beaufort expressed his concern about the proposed legislation, but said it was not the role of the bishops to prescribe political actions to Catholics. In September the archbishop stated those

who were concerned about the law should protest it, but did not call on Catholics to do so. At year's end, the national assembly passed the legislation, but the senate did not vote on it.

On September 19, Interior Minister Castaner attended the inauguration of the French Institute of Muslim Civilization (IFCM), a new national Islamic cultural center in Lyon. At the opening ceremony, Castaner spoke out against anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and all types of hate, and called the organization an essential initiative to fight prejudice and make Islam better understood in the country. Secretary General of the Muslim World League Mohammed al-Issa and Lyon Mayor Gerard Collomb also delivered remarks at the event. Collomb expressed his expectation that the IFCM would be “an instrument of peace.” The project was funded by one million-euro (\$1.12 million) grants each from the central government, the city of Lyon, and the greater metropolitan region of Lyon, in addition to 1.5 million euros (\$1.69 million) from the Muslim World League.

On January 9, Interior Minister Castaner, Justice Minister Belloubet, then-government spokesperson Benjamin Griveaux, and Junior Minister for the Disabled Sophie Cluzel attended a CRIF-organized memorial ceremony outside a Paris kosher supermarket, where four years earlier a gunman had killed four Jews and held 15 other persons hostage.

On February 20, President Macron delivered a televised speech at the annual CRIF dinner. Among the guests in attendance – who all wore badges reading “All united against Anti-Semitism” – were First Lady Brigitte Macron, former president Francois Hollande, former prime ministers Manuel Valls and Bernard Cazeneuve, 10 current cabinet members, the U.S. Ambassador, and the Israeli Ambassador. Macron stated anti-Semitism had grown and reached its worst level since World War II in the country and Europe and had gotten “worse in recent weeks.” He said he was drawing “new red lines” in the fight against hatred of Jews and announced a package of measures – some previously announced, some new – to combat the rise of anti-Semitism. Among these were that the country would define “anti-Zionism as a modern-day form of anti-Semitism,” putting it in line with the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. The government adopted the IHRA definition based on this direction, and the National Assembly passed a nonbinding resolution adopting the definition on December 3. Macron also announced the Ministry of Education would investigate the phenomenon of parents pulling their Jewish children out of public school over fears of anti-Semitism, and the government would dissolve several far-right extremist groups.

In response to a May 13 written request from Parliamentarian Meyer Habib of the Union of Democrats and Independents Party, Interior Minister Castaner declined to prohibit regular protests in favor of BDS in Paris. The minister cited as justification the right of assembly and protest enshrined in the constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Before the July 25 Europa League match between Strasbourg Racing and Haifa Maccabi (professional soccer teams from France and Israel, respectively), the local police subprefecture announced a ban on any display that could serve to identify someone as a supporter of Haifa Maccabi in key areas of Strasbourg – including in all areas in and around the stadium. The ban included not only team logos, clothing, and paraphernalia, but any “national flag” associated with the team, widely accepted as a reference to the Israeli flag. The police notice specifically stated the risk for violence, referencing that contact had been established between “violent supporters of both teams, some of whom are politicized or identified as being at the origin of manifestations of anti-Semitism.” The notice, which stated identifying as a Haifa supporter “implicated risk” to that person, was followed by an outcry on social media in both France and Israel. Critics said the ban limited freedom of expression of the potential victims of anti-Semitism rather than demanding and enforcing law-abiding behavior from all fans. Following outreach to the interior ministry by leaders of the Jewish community and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Israeli Embassy in Paris, the subprefecture issued a new notice on July 25 – just before the match – rescinding the rules.

On July 21, Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly held a ceremony in Paris honoring the victims of the 1942 Velodrome d’Hiver roundup in which 13,000 Jews, including 4,000 children, were deported to extermination camps. “France betrayed its own children,” Parly said in her statements, adding, “The roundup ... was the work of the French government, accomplished by the French.” She also promised to take up the late 19th century Dreyfus Affair, where authorities wrongly convicted Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus of treason before eventually pardoning and reinstating him in the army. Parly said it was time to posthumously recognize the honor and years taken from Dreyfus and said she would take up the case “personally.”

President Macron and government ministers condemned anti-Semitism and declared support for Holocaust education on several occasions, including a February 19 visit to the Shoah Memorial, the same day thousands marched in Paris and elsewhere in protest of anti-Semitic acts; the February 20 annual CRIF dinner; the March 19 commemoration of the seventh anniversary of the killings of three

Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 30 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration; and the June 1 Judaism Day observance. On October 29, President Macron, along with several government officials, attended the inauguration of the European Center of Judaism in Paris. “Judaism has played a key role across the continent to build all that is thought and all that is European civilization, to fundamentally forge who we are,” said President Macron in his speech.

As part of an established exchange program, the government continued to host the visit of 30 Moroccan, 120 Algerian, and 151 Turkish imams to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism within Muslim communities. The imams’ countries of origin paid their salaries. During Ramadan, when there was an increased number of worshippers, between 250 and 300 imams came to the country temporarily, including 164 from Morocco.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The MOI reported 154 registered incidents targeting Muslims, compared with 100 in 2018. Of the 154, 91 were threats and 63 were other acts, two of which involved shootings in front of a mosque in Brest in June and in front of a mosque in Bayonne in October. The government had not yet released figures on the number of acts of vandalism against Muslim places of worship (there were 45 in 2018) and of desecration against Muslim cemeteries (six in 2018) that occurred during the year. Reported anti-Semitic incidents (threats or acts) totaled 687, of which 536 were threats and 151 other acts, compared with 541 total incidents in the previous year. The rise in anti-Semitic incidents came entirely from an increase (of 50 percent) in anti-Semitic threats, whereas other acts – including attacks against persons, which fell by 44 percent – declined by 15 percent from 2018. The government also reported 1,052 anti-Christian incidents, most of which involved vandalism or other acts against property, compared with 1,063 in 2018. Of the anti-Christian incidents, 56 were threats and 996 other acts, primarily of vandalism or arson against churches and cemeteries.

On October 28, police arrested an 84-year-old man, Claude Sinke, suspected of shooting and seriously injuring two elderly Muslim men as they approached after spotting him trying to set fire to the door of the mosque in the southwestern city of Bayonne. Sinke ran in 2015 as a local candidate in Seignanx for the National

Rally Party, the party confirmed in a statement. President Macron condemned the “odious attack” in a tweet and vowed to “do everything” to punish attackers “and protect our Muslim compatriots.” The country “will never tolerate hate,” he said. Interior Minister Castaner called for “solidarity and support for the Muslim community.” National Rally leader Marine Le Pen tweeted, “These crimes must be treated with the most total severity.” At year’s end, police placed Sinke in custody for attempted murder, and judicial police opened an investigation, but the national anti-terrorism prosecutor declined to investigate the case as a terrorist incident.

On May 22, perpetrators mugged and beat a Jewish driver working for a ride-sharing company in a Paris suburb because of his Jewish-sounding name, according to authorities. The victim reported a man in his 20s was waiting for him at the appointed place and asked to sit in the front seat. Then a group of approximately 10 young men surrounded the car. One of the perpetrators told him, “You must have money, we’re going to need to frisk you.” The men then beat the driver, causing him to lose consciousness. He sustained injuries and a concussion. In July authorities charged four persons with the attack and placed one teenager in pretrial detention, stating they considered the anti-Semitic nature of the attack to be an aggravating circumstance. The others were not held in pretrial detention, either because they were minors or because of the level of charges against them. There was no further information on the case at year’s end.

On September 21, a man crashed a car into a mosque in Colmar, in the eastern part of the country, breaking down the gate and doorway of the mosque before hitting a wall. Police subdued the man, who was shouting “Allahu akbar” (“God is great”), in the prayer hall. No one was injured in the attack, although the former president of the Grand Mosque of Colmar stated approximately 60 persons were about to arrive for prayer. At year’s end, the attacker was in pretrial detention, and his motive was still under investigation. The public prosecutor of Colmar stated he charged him with attempted murder, degrading a place of worship, and willful violence with a weapon.

Authorities continued to investigate the 2018 killing of Holocaust survivor Mireille Knoll, which they were treating as a hate crime, but had not set a trial date by year’s end. The two individuals arrested in connection with the killing remained in pretrial detention.

On December 19, the investigative chamber of the Paris Court of Appeals determined that Kobili Traore, charged with the 2017 killing of his 65-year-old

Jewish neighbor, Sarah Halimi, was “criminally irresponsible” for her killing. In a reversal of a 2018 ruling, the court ruled Traore could not be held criminally responsible because he was in a delusional state from smoking marijuana heavily in the hours before the killing. The court maintained anti-Semitism as an aggravating circumstance. Traore, who confessed to killing Halimi, was reportedly heard yelling in Arabic, “Allahu Akbar” and “Shaitan” (“Satan”) as he beat Halimi. Psychiatric evaluations of Traore differed in their assessment of his mental state. The third evaluation, released March 18, judged he acted during a “delusional state” caused by cannabis use. Sammy Ghazlan, president of the National Bureau for Vigilance Against anti-Semitism (BNVCA), said, “There has been a series of failures” in police and judiciary handling of the case. He added, “Today I no longer have full confidence that anti-Semitic hate crimes in France are handled properly.” CRIF President Francis Kalifat called the decision “unsurprising but difficult to justify.” He criticized a system that “renders a murderer, who is voluntarily under the influence of drugs, unfit for trial, while condemning with greater severity a motorist who has committed an accident under the influence of the same drug.” In April 39 intellectuals wrote an opinion piece in Le Figaro newspaper expressing outrage over the possibility Traore would not stand trial. On December 20, lawyers for the family said they would appeal the ruling. At year’s end, Traore was held in a psychiatric hospital.

On April 18, the Paris Special Criminal Court convicted Abdelkader Merah of complicity in the killing by his brother, Mohammed Merah (who was killed by police), of seven persons outside a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012, and sentenced him to 30 years in prison. The court overturned the 2017 acquittal of Abdelkader Merah on the complicity charge by a Paris criminal court, which convicted him on the lesser charge of criminal terrorist conspiracy. The Special Criminal Court ordered Abdelkader Merah to serve his existing 20-year prison sentence on that lesser conspiracy charge concurrently with the 30-year sentence for complicity.

On July 16, the BNVCA reported the judge in charge of investigating the September 2017 attack on a Jewish family in Livry Gargan did not order anti-Semitism be added to the case as an aggravating circumstance. The suspects are accused of breaking into the home of Roger Pinto, the president of Siona, a group that represents Sephardic Jews, and beating Pinto’s son and wife. One of the burglars said, “You Jews have money,” according to family members.

Jehovah’s Witnesses officials reported four incidents of physical assault against their members and two cases of vandalism during the year. In one case, Church

officials reported a man punched a Jehovah's Witness in the chest and stated he "did not want to see" Jehovah's Witnesses. In another, a man apparently under the influence of alcohol interrupted two Jehovah's Witnesses while they were evangelizing and asked what they were doing. Church officials said the man then held a knife to the throat of one of the Jehovah's Witnesses and threatened to kill him if he returned. In both cases, the individuals filed complaints with the police. As of year's end, law enforcement did not file charges in either case.

On February 2, police arrested 19 persons in Strasbourg when approximately 50 Yellow Vest protesters threw rocks at police and tried to damage local property, including the main synagogue. Some protesters shouted anti-Semitic insults and launched firecrackers toward the synagogue entrance.

On June 21, authorities found death threats and racist and anti-Semitic graffiti targeting Thal-Marmoutier Mayor Jean-Claude Distel on the walls of the city hall of the nearby town of Schirrhoffen in the Bas-Rhin Department. Schirrhoffen has a large Jewish population, and Distel is a supporter of refugees and migrants. The graffiti included swastikas and anti-Semitic slurs, and the threats included, "A stabbing is coming quickly," and "Distel you are going to die." Another threat, "Distel-Lubcke," referred to a pro-immigrant German leader who was assassinated in early June.

On March 21, Education Minister Blanquer announced that among 130 racist and anti-Semitic acts teachers reported occurring in schools during the first three months of the year, 16 percent were anti-Semitic. The figures were the result of the online platform the government established in late 2018 to enable teachers to report these cases. The ministry did not release figures of anti-Semitic acts in schools that occurred later in the year.

In a joint study released November 6, the French Institute of Public Opinion and the Jean Jaures Foundation found that 42 percent of Muslims in the country reported being targets of discrimination due to their religion at some point during their life, and 32 percent said they had been targeted in the previous five years. The study reported the most common contexts for discrimination were in interactions with police (28 percent), while searching for employment (24 percent), and while seeking housing (22 percent). The study, commissioned by the DILCRAH, was the first time the government publicly researched the experiences of the Muslim community. According to the survey, 45 percent of women – and 60 percent of those who regularly wore a veil – reported experiencing discrimination, compared with 35 percent of men.

The annual report of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an advisory body to the prime minister, released in April, included the results of an Ipsos poll conducted in November 2018 and involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 1,007 residents over the age of 18. The results were almost identical to a poll Ipsos conducted a year earlier. According to the poll, 36 percent of the respondents (2 percentage points fewer than in 2017) believed Jews “have a particular relationship with money,” and 20 percent thought Jews had too much power in the country. The poll found 29 percent of respondents had a negative image of Islam and 44 percent of them considered it a threat to national identity. The commission’s report again cited what it said was persistent societal rejection of Islamic religious practices, such as women wearing a veil. It also stated there was an increase in anti-Semitic acts, which numbered 541, up 74 percent from 311 acts in 2017.

In November the Anti-Defamation League released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country’s residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were “probably true” or “probably false.” The proportion agreeing that various statements were “probably true” was: 32 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to France; 29 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 31 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

In January the EC issued a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each EU member state. According to the survey, 72 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in France, and 51 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 78 percent; on the internet, 74 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 80 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 80 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 84 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 83 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 73 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 59 percent; and anti-Semitism in the media, 63 percent.

In May the EC carried out a study in each EU member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 69 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the country, while 27 percent said it was rare; 83 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religion than the majority of the

population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 95 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, 95 percent said they would be with an atheist, 94 percent with a Jew, 93 percent with a Buddhist, and 92 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if a child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 94 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 93 percent if atheist, 90 percent if Jewish, 87 percent if Buddhist, and 81 percent if Muslim.

A Pew Research Center survey released in October found 22 percent of residents had an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, down 7 percentage points from 29 percent in 2016. Individuals aged 60 and older were much more likely to hold an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, at 38 percent, than those aged 18 to 34 (11 percent). The same survey found that 6 percent of persons had an unfavorable opinion of Jews.

On October 2, a Paris criminal court convicted Alain Bonnet, known as Alain Soral, of public anti-Semitic insults and “provocation to discrimination, hatred, or violence against Jews” and sentenced him to one year in prison for referring to the Pantheon, a national mausoleum of French notables, as a “kosher wasteland” in a video posted on his website. The court stated his language evoked the dehumanization and suffering Jews faced in concentration and death camps. The court also ordered Soral to take down the video and pay 1,000 euros (\$1,100) in damages to the League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, as well as one euro (\$1) in symbolic damages to three other civil society organizations. It was Soral’s fourth conviction of the year, following previous violations for Holocaust denial, anti-Semitic insults, and publishing an anti-Semitic video, for which he was sentenced to one year, one year, and 18 months, respectively, in addition to multiple earlier convictions on similar charges. Soral remained free while he appealed all four convictions.

In February a Muslim convert, Benjamin Weller, shouted anti-Semitic epithets, such as “Go back to Tel Aviv,” and “We are the French people, France is ours,” at Jewish philosopher Alain Finkielkraut during a Yellow Vest protest. Finkielkraut is a member of the *Academie Francaise*, the country’s preeminent intellectual institution, and the son of a survivor of Auschwitz. In response, President Macron tweeted, “The anti-Semitic insults he was subjected to are the absolute negation of what we are and what makes us a great nation. We will not tolerate them.” Interior Minister Castaner and then-government Spokesperson Griveaux, among others, also condemned the incident. On July 12, the Paris Criminal Court convicted Weller of making public insults based on “origins, ethnic origin,

country, race, or religion” and sentenced him to a suspended two-month prison sentence.

On February 10, unknown persons wrote the word “Juden” (German for “Jew”) on the window of a bagel shop in central Paris. Minister of Interior Castaner and then-government spokesperson Griveaux both condemned the act. The Paris prosecutor’s office opened an investigation for “aggravated voluntary damage” and “provocation to racial hatred.” At year’s end, authorities did not identify any suspects.

On February 11, unknown persons chopped down a tree planted in a Paris suburb in memory Ilan Halimi, the Jewish man killed in 2006. Police opened an investigation, and DILCRAH Head Prefect Frederic Potier described the incident as “ignominious.” Interior Minister Castaner said anti-Semitism was spreading like poison, and the attack on Halimi’s memory was an attack on the republic.

In February in Quatzenheim, near Strasbourg, vandals defaced more than 90 graves at a Jewish cemetery. President Macron and Interior Minister Castaner visited the site on February 19, and prefecture and local politicians condemned the attack. On December 2, vandals desecrated more than 100 graves in the Jewish cemetery of Westhoffen, a town near Strasbourg. Spray-painted swastikas and the number “14,” associated with white supremacy, covered headstones. On the same day, residents found similar graffiti scrawled on the synagogue and the mayor’s office in the town of Schaffhouse-sur-Zorn, approximately 12 miles from Westhoffen. Both President Macron and Interior Minister Castaner condemned the acts, and Castaner visited the Westhoffen cemetery with community leaders on December 4. The gendarmerie in Westhoffen opened an investigation into the incident there, led by a special investigative unit.

Following a series of anti-Semitic incidents in the eastern part of the country, in April the Departmental Council in the Lower Rhine Department approved a list of 10 initiatives, mostly aimed at youth, to counter anti-Semitism and foster a culture of mutual understanding and respect. Citizen volunteers, Jewish and non-Jewish, also organized a Jewish cemetery watch in the Upper Rhine Department.

In March workers building a mosque in the southwestern town of Bergerac found a pig’s head and animal blood at the entrance to the site. The Bergerac police commissioner condemned the act.

In April two persons filmed themselves urinating on the property of UEJF at Dauphine University in Paris and streamed it live on social media. The UEJF called the act anti-Semitic and filed a police complaint against the men.

In late December 2018, according to press reports, a car belonging to a Jewish family in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles was broken into, filled up with trash, and had a mezuzah glued to its windshield. The mezuzah had been stolen from the family's home months earlier. The family filed a complaint with police for a hate crime.

On May 13, police opened an investigation into the vandalism of a commemorative plaque in Paris devoted to Jewish children arrested by the Vichy government in the 1942 Velodrome d'Hiver roundup and deported to Nazi death camps. The graffiti included the number 4,115, representing the number of Jewish children arrested by the Vichy police and the word "extermination." Paris 15th District Mayor Philippe Goujon denounced the act, and Paris City Hall and BNVCA filed a complaint with the Paris prosecutor's office. At year's end, authorities did not identify any suspects.

In February there were reports of at least 10 incidents of vandalism and desecration of Catholic churches. Incidents included smashing statues, knocking down tabernacles, scattering or destroying the Eucharist host, burning altar cloths, and tearing down crosses. Individuals vandalized five churches in separate incidents over the span of a week in Dijon, Nimes, Lavaur (Tarn Department), Maisons-Laffitte, and Houilles (Yvelines Department). At the Notre-Dame-Des-Enfants Church in the southern city of Nimes, vandals broke the tabernacle, damaged religious objects, and smeared excrement in the shape of a cross on the interior walls. In May police arrested a 21-year-old local resident, who admitted involvement in the Nimes incident. His trial was scheduled for March 2020. In response to the acts, Prime Minister Philippe said, "In our secular republic, we respect places of worship. Such acts shock me and must be unanimously condemned." He also discussed the incidents with the Conference of Bishops. In June unknown persons toppled more than 100 tombstones in the main Catholic cemetery in Toulouse, *The Catholic Herald* reported.

A Jewish school in southern Paris received a letter in February with anti-Semitic messages, including "France is the base for Zionism in Europe" and "If Adolf Hitler had exterminated all the Jews, the Arab countries would live in peace." The school filed a complaint with the police, who opened an investigation. At year's end, they did not identify any suspects.

After reports that an administrator at an Orthodox Jewish high school leaked national exam materials to students in an effort to boost the school's results, users posted hundreds of anti-Semitic posts on Twitter. The tweets included accusations that the students would avoid punishment because of their "protected community" status and that Jews "control everything" in the country.

On October 27, nearly 100 graves in a Christian cemetery in Cognac were vandalized and Christian symbols, including crosses, crucifixes, and angels, were damaged. Police arrested an 18-year-old man in connection with the incident. In online postings, the suspect had written about being a "Satanist" and "hating religion," and also stated that "voices tell [him] to do certain things." Prosecutors said he would undergo psychiatric evaluation before facing trial. Authorities placed him under a curfew and judicial control (similar to parole), pending trial.

On November 4, three burglars gained access to the Oloron-Sainte-Marie Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Pyrenees-Atlantiques Region, by ramming and destroying its medieval wooden door with their car. They then stole art and artifacts from the cathedral's treasury, including gold and silver works, a chalice, and a monstrance. Local police launched an investigation.

In February sports retailer Decathlon cancelled plans to sell a "running hijab" in the country following what it said was "the violent polemic aroused and threats uttered." Politicians stated the "running hijab" contradicted the country's secular values, and some lawmakers suggested a boycott of the brand. Lydia Guirous, spokeswoman for the Republicans Party, told a local news channel that the country "must stop giving in to Islam" because "it is a betrayal of women's rights." Socialist Party Senator Laurence Rossignol cited the International League for Women's Rights, which denounced the new hijab as an item "whose sole purpose is to prolong sexual apartheid." Minister of Health Agnes Buzyn said, "I find that it does not correspond well to the values of our country." Junior Minister Schiappa wrote on the controversy, "It does not seem appropriate to prohibit women from wearing a hijab ... as long as it respects the law," but questioned "any intrusion by the religious in social issues." Laura Youkana, a spokeswoman for the Muslim feminist organization Lallab, stated, "Those who attack the hijab speak in the name of women's rights, but this is something that actually enables a woman to practice sports, and sports is something that emancipates women."

In December France 24 reported the country's Uighur Association said the Chinese government was threatening members of the Muslim Uighur community in France

to induce it to spy on fellow Uighurs. The report cited a spokesperson for the association, who said a French Uighur provided personal information to Chinese police on her Uighur work colleagues out of fear of reprisals against her family in Xinjiang. Another Uighur testified his family in Xinjiang was arrested because he refused to return to China. The spokesperson added the Chinese government had successfully sowed distrust within the local Uighur community.

In November CRIF held its tenth annual convention in Paris, titling it, “Fractured France: Can We Unite Against Anti-Semitism?” CRIF President Francis Kalifat cited the challenges of growing anti-Semitism and stated 12 Jews had been killed in the country in the previous 20 years because they were Jewish. Education Minister Blanquer outlined the government’s strategy to combat anti-Semitism in schools and Interior Minister Castaner said, “I want zero tolerance towards anti-Semitism,” adding that the government was committed to combating online hate speech.

On June 16, Strasbourg celebrated the 12th anniversary of its interfaith dialogue initiative, which continued to bring together religious leaders from Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths.

In August for the third consecutive year, young Christians and Muslims from across the country, Europe, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East participated in a three-day “weekend of friendship” event at the Taizé Ecumenical Community in the Department of Saone-et-Loire. The approximately 200 participants attended panels and shared religious experiences. The conference focused on two themes: hospitality; and the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” a joint statement signed in February by Pope Francis and Egypt’s Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar.

The Council of Christian Churches in France, composed of 10 representatives from the Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic Churches, continued to serve as a forum for dialogue. One observer represented the Anglican Communion on the council. The council met twice in plenary session and twice at the working level.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom and tolerance with relevant government officials, including at the religious affairs offices of the Ministries of

the Interior and Foreign Affairs. The Ambassador met with Interior Minister Castaner and DILCRAH Head Prefect Potier. Topics discussed included religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, the BDS movement, Holocaust-related compensation, and bilateral cooperation on these issues.

In November embassy personnel and the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Counselor for Religious Affairs Ambassador Jean-Christophe Peaucelle, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Holocaust Issues Francois Croquette, and other government, religious, and civil society leaders to discuss means of countering anti-Semitism. The Ambassador met in Paris with Rector of Notre Dame Cathedral of Paris Patrick Chauvet to exchange views on religious freedom and tolerance and to express support for the reconstruction of the cathedral.

On November 26, the Ambassador hosted a roundtable dinner of civil society, business, and government leaders, and the Israeli Ambassador to solicit recommendations and share best practices on combating anti-Semitism. On November 23, the Ambassador spoke at the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Natzweiler-Struthof Concentration Camp on the issue of religious freedom and combatting religiously based hate crimes.

Staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs met regularly with religious community leaders, activists, and private citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and to advocate tolerance for diversity. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and interfaith dialogue and tolerance with senior Christian, Muslim, and Jewish representatives and NGOs such as Coexister and AJC Europe. They also hosted meetings with representatives from CRIF, the Israelite Central Consistory of France (the main Jewish administrative governance body), the CFCM, and the Paris Great Mosque, Catholic priests, and Protestant representatives working on interfaith dialogue.

The Ambassador and mission personnel engaged regularly with senior Israeli embassy representatives on efforts and best practices to counter anti-Semitism in the country. Embassy officials closely monitored and reported on the official government position on the BDS movement and anti-Semitic incidents. The embassy highlighted such incidents on embassy social media platforms to bring more visibility to the issue and to publicly express U.S. concern.

The embassy continued to support Coexister, a local association promoting interfaith dialogue and social cohesion, with funding assistance for the association's Interfaith World Tour. With some embassy funding, four young interfaith representatives began an eight-month world tour in August to meet and conduct interviews with interfaith leaders in 25 countries, including the United States. The team will produce a documentary film from the tour to be used for presentations at French public schools and conferences with the aim of deepening awareness of, and interest in, international initiatives on interfaith dialogue.

The embassy also funded the participation of a representative from the Hozes Institute – which, among other activities, provides civic and French language classes for imams – in an exchange program in the United States to examine the role and impact of religion in society and bridge gaps among faith groups.

Through a grant, the embassy and the APP in Bordeaux supported a film shown in November and December on national television channel ARTE. The film, the story of an imam in Mont-de-Marsan, was shown to youth audiences and associations in and around Bordeaux to encourage dialogue and religious tolerance.

Through a grant for past participants in U.S. government-funded exchange programs, one Jewish organization and one Muslim organization in Bordeaux began a series of workshops in September to promote religious tolerance among youth.

In September the Consulate General in Marseille hosted an interfaith lunch with Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox clergy, where participants discussed religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, and local, private efforts to increase communication and interfaith social engagement.

Also in September the Consulate General in Strasbourg hosted an interfaith lunch with key local government, civil society, and religious authorities to present key points from the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom held in Washington in July and to solicit recommendations for actions the United States could take to combat the rise in anti-Semitic acts in eastern France.

On October 25, the embassy hosted a ceremony commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Tree of Life Synagogue attack in Pittsburgh. Addressing an audience that included France's Grand Rabbi Haim Korsia, government officials, and Jewish, Muslim, and Christian community representatives, the Ambassador

noted the rise of anti-Semitic attacks around the world, including locally. She used the event to condemn acts of intolerance and call for unity and action against hate.

The embassy regularly amplified messages from the Secretary of State and Department of State on religious freedom via embassy social media platforms in French and in English. The embassy also complemented Washington messaging with original content in French, for example in marking the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief and the International Day of Religious Freedom. Embassy social media outreach highlighted the importance of religious freedom as a core American value and demonstrated how France and the United States worked together on the issue.