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USDOS – US Department of State

2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Jordan

Executive Summary

The constitution declares Islam the religion of the state but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. The constitution stipulates there shall be no discrimination based on religion. The constitution does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. The constitution and the law, however, allow sharia courts to determine civil status affairs for Muslims and allow these courts to prohibit Muslims from converting to another religion. Under sharia, converts from Islam are still considered Muslims and are subject to sharia but are regarded as apostates. According to the constitution, matters concerning the personal and family status of Muslims come under the jurisdiction of sharia courts, while six of the 11 recognized Christian groups have religious courts to address such matters for their members. The government continued to deny official recognition to some religious groups, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In December the attorney general ordered the detention of media personality Mohammad al-Wakeel and an editor working at his website, Al-Wakeel News, for posting on Facebook a cartoon deemed offensive to Jesus. The post was taken down a few hours later, and al-Wakeel published an apology to the public. Authorities released the two men two days later. The government continued to monitor sermons at mosques and to require preachers to refrain from political commentary and stick to approved themes and texts during Friday sermons. An official committee chaired by the grand mufti regulated which Islamic clerics could issue fatwas. Converts to Christianity from Islam reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their true religious beliefs and practices. Members of unregistered groups continued to face problems registering their marriages, the religious affiliation of their children, and renewing their residency permits. Security forces increased their presence in and protection of Christian areas, especially during special events and holidays, following an August 10 attack targeting security forces near a music festival outside the predominantly Christian city of Fuhais. Christian leaders said they regarded this presence as part of a government effort to provide additional security at public gathering places, including security for worshippers.

Interfaith religious leaders reported continued online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and moderates, frequently through social media. Social media users also defended interfaith tolerance, condemning videos and online posts that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue. Some converts to Christianity from Islam continued to report ostracism as well as physical and verbal abuse from their families and communities, and some converts worshipped in secret as a result of the social stigma they faced. The government did not prosecute converts from Islam for apostasy, but some reported persistent and credible threats from family members concerned with protecting traditional honor.

The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all

levels to support the rights of religious minorities to practice their faiths freely and to promote interfaith tolerance, raising issues such as the renewal of residency permits for religious volunteers. The Charge and other embassy officers met with Muslim scholars and Christian community leaders to encourage interfaith dialogue. The embassy supported exchange programs promoting religious tolerance as well as civil society programs to preserve the cultural heritage of religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.5 million (July 2018 estimate). According to U.S. government estimates, Muslims, virtually all of whom are Sunni, make up 97.2 percent of the population and Christians 2.2 percent. Groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, and Druze (who are considered Muslim by the government). These estimates do not include migrant workers or refugees. According to the Ministry of Labor (MOL), there are approximately 670,000 migrant workers in the country, mostly from Egypt, South and East Asia, and Africa. Migrant workers from Africa and South and East Asia are often Hindu or Christian. There are more than 757,000 refugees in the country registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 57 countries of origin, including approximately 670,000 Syrians and 67,000 Iraqis. The Syrian and Iraqi refugee populations are mostly Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims and Christians account for less than one third of the Iraqi refugee population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares Islam “the religion of the state” but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. The constitution stipulates there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion. It states the king must be a Muslim. The constitution allows for religious courts, including sharia courts for Muslims and courts for non-Muslim for religious communities recognized by the government.

The constitution does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. The constitution and the law, however, allow sharia courts to determine civil status affairs for Muslims and allow these courts to prohibit Muslims from converting to another religion. Under sharia, converts from Islam are still considered Muslims and are subject to sharia but are regarded as apostates. Neither the penal code nor the criminal code specifies a penalty for apostasy. Sharia courts, however, have jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and individuals declared to be apostates may have their marriages annulled or be disinherited, except in the presence of a will that states otherwise. Any member of society may file an apostasy complaint against such individuals before the Sharia Public Prosecution. The Sharia Public Prosecution consults with the Council of Churches before converting a Christian to Islam, to avoid conversions for purposes of marriage and/or divorces only, and not religious conviction. The penal code contains articles criminalizing acts such as incitement of hatred, blasphemy against Abrahamic faiths, undermining the regime, or portraying Jordanians in a manner that violates their dignity, according to government statements.

Authorities may prosecute individuals who proselytize Muslims under the penal code's provisions against “inciting sectarian conflict” or “harming the national unity.” Although these prosecutions may

occur in the State Security Court, cases are usually tried in other courts. Both of these offenses are punishable by imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to 50 Jordanian dinars (\$71).

Islamic religious groups are granted recognition through the constitution and do not need to register. Non-Islamic religious groups must obtain official recognition through registration. If registered as “denominations,” they may administer rites such as marriage (there is no provision for civil marriage). They may also own land, open bank accounts, and enter into contracts. Religious groups may also be registered as “associations” and if so, they must work through a recognized denomination on matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, but may own property and open bank accounts. They must obtain government approval to accept foreign funding. Recognized non-Islamic religious groups are tax exempt but do not receive the government subsidies granted to Islamic religious groups.

Nonrecognized religious groups lack legal status and may not undertake basic administrative tasks such as opening bank accounts, purchasing real estate, or hiring staff. Individuals may exercise such activities and as such may designate an individual to perform these functions on behalf of the unrecognized group, however. To register as a recognized religious group, the group must submit its bylaws, a list of its members, its budget, and information about its religious doctrine. In determining whether to register or recognize Christian groups, the prime minister confers with the minister of the interior and the Council of Church Leaders (CCL), a government advisory body comprising the heads of the country’s 11 officially recognized Christian denominations. The government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian groups: the group’s teachings must not contradict the nature of the constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches, a regional body comprising four families of churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant/Evangelical), must recognize it; its religious doctrine must not be antagonistic to Islam as the state religion; and the group’s membership must meet a minimum number of citizens, although a precise figure is not specified.

The law lists 11 officially recognized Christian religious groups: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Anglican, Maronite Catholic, Lutheran, Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Coptic. In 2018, five additional evangelical Christian denominations, formerly registered under the Ministry of Justice, were recognized by the Ministry of Interior as well, but have not been permitted to establish a court: the Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptists. The government has continued to deny official recognition to some religious groups, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The government granted legal status to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2018.

The CCL consists of the heads of the country’s 11 historically recognized Christian denominations and serves as an administrative body to facilitate tax and customs exemptions, as well as the issuance of civil documents (marriage or inheritance). In other matters, such as issuing work permits or purchasing land, the denominations interact directly with the relevant ministries. Religious groups that do not have representatives on the CCL handle administrative tasks through the ministry relevant to the task. Nonrecognized Christian groups do not have representatives on the CCL, have no legal status as entities, and must have individual members of their groups conduct business with the government on their behalf.

According to the constitution, a special provision of the law regulates the activities and administration of finances of the Islamic awqaf (religious endowments). Per this provision of the law, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs manages mosques, including appointing imams, paying mosque staff salaries, managing Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizing certain mosque-sponsored activities, such as

holiday celebrations and religious observances. Other Islamic institutions are the Supreme (Sharia) Justice Department, which is headed by the Office of the Supreme (Sharia) Justice (OSJ) and is in charge of the sharia courts, and the General Ifta’ Department, which issues fatwas.

Since 2017, the government requires imams to adhere to officially prescribed themes and texts for Friday sermons. According to the law, Muslim clergy who do not follow government policy may be suspended, issued a written warning, banned from delivering Friday sermons for a certain period, or dismissed from Ministry of Awqaf employment. In addition to these administrative measures, a preacher who violates the law may be imprisoned for a period of one week to one month, or be given a fine not to exceed 20 dinars (\$28).

The law forbids any Islamic cleric from issuing a fatwa unless officially authorized by an official committee headed by the grand mufti in the General Ifta’ Department. This department is independent from the Ministry of Awqaf with the rank of mufti being equal to that of a minister.

The law prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult “founders of religion or prophets” or are deemed contemptuous of “any of the religions whose freedom is protected by the constitution,” and imposes a fine on violators of up to 20,000 dinars (\$28,200).

By law, public schools provide Islamic religious instruction as part of the basic national curriculum; non-Muslim students are allowed to opt out. Private schools may offer alternative religious instruction. The constitution provides “congregations” (a term not defined in the constitution, but legally including religious groups recognized as denominations and associations) with the right to establish their own schools provided “they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to the control of government in matters relating to their curricula and orientation.” In order to operate a school, religious institutions must receive permission from the Ministry of Education, which ensures the curriculum meets national standards. The Ministry of Education does not oversee religious courses if religious groups offer them at their places of worship. In several cities, recognized Christian groups – including Baptists, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics – operate private schools and are able to conduct classes on Christianity. The schools are open to adherents of all religions.

Knowledge of the Quran is required by law for Muslim students in both public and private schools, but it is optional for non-Muslims. Every student, however, must pass an Arabic language exam in his or her final year of high school, which includes linguistic mastery of some verses of the Quran. Islamic religion is an optional subject for university entrance exams for non-Muslim students following the standard curriculum or for Muslim students following international curricula.

The constitution specifies the judiciary shall be divided into civil courts, religious courts, and special courts, with religious courts divided into sharia courts and tribunals of other recognized religious communities. According to the constitution, matters concerning personal status, which include religious affiliation, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are under the jurisdiction of religious courts. Matters of personal status in which the parties are Muslim fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the sharia courts. A personal or family status case in which one party is Muslim and the other is non-Muslim is heard by a civil court unless both parties agree to use a sharia court. Per the constitution, matters of personal status of non-Muslims whose religion the government officially recognizes are under the jurisdiction of denomination-specific courts of religious communities. Such courts exist for the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, and Anglican communities. According to the law, members of recognized denominations lacking their own courts must take their cases to civil courts, which, in principle, follow

the rules and beliefs of the litigants' denomination in deciding cases, unless both parties to a case agree to use a specific religious court. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of nonrecognized religious groups. Such individuals must request a civil court to hear their case.

The OSJ appoints sharia judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. The law stipulates the cabinet must ratify the procedures of each non-Muslim religious (known as ecclesiastical) courts. All judicial nominations must be approved by a royal decree.

According to the constitution, sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction with respect to cases concerning “blood money” (*diyya*) in which the two parties are Muslims or one of the parties is not a Muslim and the two parties consent to the jurisdiction of the sharia courts. Sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction with regard to matters pertaining to Islamic awqaf. Muslims are also subject to the jurisdiction of sharia courts on civil matters not addressed by civil status legislation.

Sharia courts do not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status. Sharia court judges may annul the marriages of converts and transfer child custody to a Muslim nonparent family member or declare the children “wards of the state” and convey an individual's property rights to Muslim family members.

According to sharia, marriages between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man are not permitted; the man must convert to Islam for the marriage to be considered legal. If a Christian woman converts to Islam while married to a Christian man, her husband must also convert for their marriage to remain legal. There is no legal provision for civil marriage or divorce for members of nonrecognized religious groups. Members of nonregistered Christian groups, as well as members of groups registered as associations, may obtain marriage certificates from any recognized Christian denomination such as the Anglican Church, which they then may take to the Civil Status Bureau to receive their government marriage certificates.

Sharia governs all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. Historically, if a Muslim husband and non-Muslim wife divorce, the wife loses custody of the children when they reach seven years of age. In December an amendment to the Personal Status Law was passed, stipulating that mothers should retain custody of their children until age 18. The new amendment contains no mention of religious affiliation. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered Muslims and are not legally allowed to reconvert to their father's prior religion or convert to any other religion. In accordance with sharia, adult children of a man who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam, unless the father's will states otherwise. All citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance if no equivalent inheritance guidelines are codified in their religion or if the state does not recognize their religion.

National identification cards issued since May 2016 do not list religion, but religious affiliation is contained in records embedded in the card's electronic chip and remains on file in other government records. Passports issued since May 2016 do not list religion. Atheists and agnostics must list the religious affiliation of their families as their own. Per the ban on conversion from Islam under sharia, converts from Islam to Christianity are not allowed to change their religion on the electronic records. Converts from Christianity to Islam may change their religion on their civil documents such as family books (a national registration record issued to every head of family), and on electronic records.

According to the electoral law, Christians are allocated nine out of 130 parliamentary seats or 6.9

percent. Christians may not run for additional seats. No seats are reserved for adherents of other minority religious groups. The government classifies Druze as Muslims and permits them to hold office.

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

Government Practices

On December 10, the Attorney General ordered the detention of media personality Mohammad al-Wakeel and an editor working at his website, Al-Wakeel News, for posting on Facebook a cartoon deemed offensive to Jesus. Authorities charged the men with sectarian incitement and causing religious strife per the article of the penal code stipulating hate speech, as well as with violations of the cybercrimes law and the press and publications law. The cartoon, posted on December 8, depicted Turkish chef “Salt Bae” – real name Nusret Gokce – sprinkling salt on the food at the Last Supper of Jesus. Social media users commented to the website that the drawing was religiously insensitive and would cause strife between Muslims and Christians in the country. The post was taken down a few hours later, and al-Wakeel published an apology to the public. Authorities released Al-Wakeel and the editor, Ghadeer Rbeihat, two days later.

Converts to Islam from Christianity continued to report security officials questioning them about their religious beliefs and practices, as well as surveillance, as part of the government’s effort to prevent conversions of convenience for the purpose of receiving advantageous divorce or inheritance benefits. Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported they continued to worship in secret to avoid scrutiny by security officials. Because of the ban on conversion under sharia, government officials generally refused to change religion listed on official documents from Islam to any other religion. Accordingly, the converts’ religious practice did not match their official religion, opening them up to claims of apostasy and personal status issues involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance. During the year, several adult Christians reported discovering that because of a parent’s subsequent conversion to Islam, the individuals had been automatically re-registered as Muslims in some government files, leading to inconsistencies in their records and causing bureaucratic obstacles and administrative holdups when trying to apply for marriage licenses or register for university.

Members of religious groups who were unable to obtain religious divorces converted to another Christian denomination or to Islam to divorce legally, according to reports from religious leaders and the Ministry of Justice. The chief of the OSJ reportedly continued to try to ensure that Christians wanting to convert to Islam did not have a pending divorce case at one of the Christian religious courts to prevent them from converting for the sole purpose of obtaining a legal divorce. The OSJ reportedly continued to enforce the interview requirement, introduced in 2017, for converts to Islam to determine whether their conversion reflected a genuine religious belief.

According to journalists who cover religious topics, the government continued to monitor sermons at mosques and to require that preachers refrain from political commentary, which the government deemed could instigate social or political unrest, and to counter radicalization. Authorities continued to disseminate themes and required imams to choose from a list of recommended texts for sermons. Imams who violated these rules continued to risk being fined or banned from preaching. According to the grand mufti, the Ministry of Awqaf discovered some unregistered imams leading prayers in mosques during the year. In these cases, the government ordered all attendees and imams to cease their activities and gather in a designated mosque in their area for the Friday sermons led by a registered imam. In light of concerns expressed by religious minorities regarding intolerant preaching

by some Muslims, the government called for the consolidation of Friday prayers into central mosques over which they had more oversight. There continued to be unofficial mosques operating outside Ministry of Awqaf control in many cities, as well as imams outside of government employment who preached without Ministry of Awqaf supervision.

In March the government began enforcing a new residency policy enacted in October 2017 to limit the ability of churches to sponsor religious volunteers for residency, suggesting that the volunteers were illegally proselytizing Muslims. Authorities previously allowed the churches to obtain residency status for religious volunteers with the approval of the Ministry of Interior and a letter of sponsorship from the church. Volunteers must now obtain additional approvals, including the MOL, lengthening the average renewal process by several months.

The government policy of not recognizing the Baha'i Faith continued, but the government continued to allow Baha'is to practice their religion and included them in interfaith events. Sharia courts and the courts of other recognized religions continued not to issue to Baha'is the marriage certificates required to transfer citizenship to a foreign spouse or to register for government health insurance and social security. The Department of Civil Status and Passports also continued not to recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, but it issued family books to Baha'is, allowing them to register their children, except in cases of marriages between a Baha'i man and a Baha'i woman erroneously registered as Muslim. In those cases, the children were considered illegitimate and were not issued birth certificates or included in the family and subsequently were unable to obtain citizenship or register for school. The Baha'is were able to obtain some documents such as marriage certificates through the civil courts, although they reportedly were required to pay fees which sometimes amounted to more than 500 dinars (\$710) for documents normally available for five dinars (\$7) through religious courts.

Other nonrecognized religious groups reported they continued to operate schools and hospitals, and also to hold services and meetings if they were low profile.

According to observers, recognized Christian denominations with the rights and privileges associated with membership in the CCL guarded this status, and continued to foster a degree of competition among other religious groups hoping to attain membership. Despite efforts to alter their status, some evangelical Christian groups remained unrecognized either as denominations or as associations. Leaders from some CCL-affiliated churches continued to say that there were “recruitment efforts” against their members by evangelical churches and that evangelical churches were disrupting interfaith harmony and the CCL's relationship with the government and security services.

Some Christian leaders continued to express concern the CCL did not meet regularly and lacked the capacity to manage the affairs of both recognized and nonrecognized Christian groups effectively and fairly, especially in relation to their daily lives. Most CCL leaders remained based in Jerusalem.

Security forces confirmed they devoted extra resources to protect Christian neighborhoods and churches for holidays and special events, increasing security even further after an August 10 attack targeting Jordanian security forces near a music festival outside the predominantly Christian town of Fuhais. Christian leaders said they regarded this presence as part of the government effort to provide additional security at public gathering places, including security for religious worshippers. The church leaders stated they especially appreciated the extra protection during religious holidays and large events.

Druze continued to worship at and socialize in buildings belonging to the Druze community. The

government continued to record Druze as Muslims on civil documents identifying the bearer's religious affiliation, without public objection from the Druze. Religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, served in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Druze continued to report discrimination in reaching high positions in government and official departments.

The government continued to permit non-Muslim members of the armed forces to practice their religion. Christians and Druze achieved general officer rank in the military, but Muslims continued to hold most senior positions across the security and intelligence services.

Members of non-Muslim religious groups continued to report occasional threats by the government to arrest them for violating the public order if they proselytized Muslims. Security officials continued to refuse to renew residency permits for some foreign religious leaders and religious volunteers living in the country after raising concerns their activities could incite extremist attacks. Others were refused on the basis of proselytization accusations and additional requirements were imposed on residency renewals for religious volunteers in general.

There continued to be two recognized Baha'i cemeteries registered in the name of the Baha'i Faith through a special arrangement previously agreed between the group and the government. Baha'i leaders reported they continued to be unable to register other properties under the name of the Baha'i Faith but remained able to register property under the names of individual Baha'is. In doing so, the Baha'i leaders said, they continued to have to pay new registration fees whenever they transferred property from one person to another at the death of the registered owner, a process constituting a large financial burden.

The Ministry of Education did not undertake school curriculum revisions during the year, following a rolling back of curriculum revisions that met with resistance in 2017. Intended to promote tolerance, parents and teachers' groups stated that the changes were distancing students from Islamic values and promoted normalization of relations with Israel. The curriculum continued the past practice of omitting mention of the Holocaust.

In August amendments to the cybercrimes law were introduced to parliament including increased penalties for a broadened definition of online hate speech, defined as “any statement or act that would provoke religious, sectarian, ethnic, or regional sedition; calling for violence and justifying it; or spreading rumors against people with the aim of causing them, as a result, physical harm or damage to their assets or reputation.” After sustained public protest, the amendments were withdrawn and re-submitted to parliament with a tighter definition that excluded mention of religion. The new amendment, still under consideration by parliament at the end of the year, defines hate speech as “any statement or act intended to provoke “sectarian or racial tension or strife among different elements of the nation.”

In June the Templeton Foundation announced that King Abdullah would receive the 2018 Templeton Prize, which honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. In the award announcement, the foundation said the king “has done more to seek religious harmony within Islam and between Islam and other religions than any other living political leader.” The king received the award in a ceremony at the Washington National Cathedral on November 13.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Converts from Islam to Christianity reported continued social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse, including beatings, insults, and intimidation from family members, neighbors, and community or tribal members. Some converts from Islam to Christianity reported they worshipped in secret because of the social stigma they faced as converts. Some converts from Islam reported persistent and credible threats from family members concerned with protecting traditional honor.

Interfaith religious leaders reported continuing online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and those who advocated religious moderation, frequently through social media. Mohammad Nuh al-Qudah, a member of parliament and prominent Muslim preacher, on his online television show criticized females, especially young women, who did not wear the hijab, calling them blasphemous and stupid.

There was also an uptick in hate speech in social media and in the press directed at the Jewish faith after the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Articles frequently appeared in mainstream media outlets such as *Al Ghad* that referred to Judaism in Arabic as “the heresy of the Zionist people,” described estimates of the number of Jews as fabricated, celebrated a perceived decline in the number of Jews, and ended with statements such as “the future is ours.”

Some social media users defended religious freedom, including a mostly critical reaction to al-Qudah’s remarks and calls for his show to be cancelled. Thousands of Christians and Muslims also left comments online condemning a University of Jordan professor’s lecture in March which criticized the Bible along with the Christian and Jewish faiths. Following this incident, which provoked condemnation from Speaker of Parliament Atef Tarawneh and other members of parliament, the professor ended his many-year practice of posting lectures online.

Criticism online and in social media continued to target converts from Islam to other religions. Religious minorities expressed concerns some Muslim leaders preached intolerance; Christians reported they self-segregated into Christian enclaves to escape social pressure and threats.

Church leaders continued to report incidents of violence and discrimination against religious converts and individuals in interfaith romantic relationships. Some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Individuals in interfaith romantic relationships continued to report ostracism and, in some cases, feuds among family members and violence toward the individuals involved.

The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC), Community Ecumenical Center, and Catholic Center for Media Studies continued to sponsor initiatives promoting collaboration among religious groups. In September the JICRC and National Council for Family Affairs hosted a Family and Societal Harmony Conference, which compared the family and institutional experiences of Muslims and Christians in Jordan and explored ways to work together to counter violence, extremism, and terrorism. Baha’is continued to be included by other religious groups in interfaith conferences, religious celebrations, and World Interfaith Harmony Week in February, which included activities across the country and within the armed forces.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including the minister of awqaf, the grand mufti, the minister of foreign affairs, and officials at the Royal Hashemite Court to raise the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, interfaith tolerance, and the legal status of religious workers and volunteers. In June the Charge d’Affaires hosted an interfaith iftar during Ramadan with the expressed purpose of highlighting religious diversity, increasing engagement with civil society about tolerance and religious freedom, and building partnerships to advance minority rights. The gathering brought together a diverse set of religious leaders including evangelical Christian pastors, the director of the Baha’i Faith Community, heads of interfaith cooperation nongovernmental organizations, sharia judges, and the grand mufti.

Embassy officers continued to meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, including nonrecognized groups, religious converts, and interfaith institutions such as the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, to discuss the ability to practice religion freely. In September the embassy hosted the Jordanian delegation to the summer Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C. to discuss follow-up from the conference and general religious freedom trends in the country. Representatives from the embassy attended the JICRC’s conference on Societal Harmony and engaged with conference leaders on potential programmatic collaborations.

The embassy continued its sponsorship of the participation of religious scholars, teachers, and leaders in exchange programs in the United States designed to promote religious tolerance and a better understanding of the right to practice one’s faith as a fundamental human right and source of stability. In October the embassy granted a \$750,000 award for a project to preserve religious and cultural heritage, focusing on protecting the country’s interfaith tradition and highlighting the heritage of religious minorities. The nonprofit organization Search for Common Ground is scheduled to implement the project, building interfaith youth coalitions in six communities to promote and preserve religious heritage sites.

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