

2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Spain

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It is a crime to prevent or disrupt religious services or to offend or scorn religious beliefs, ceremonies, or practitioners. By law the definition of hate crimes includes acts of “humiliation or disrespect” based on the religion of the victim. While the law provides that no religion shall have a “state character,” the government has cooperative relations with religious faiths. The government’s bilateral agreement with the Holy See grants the Catholic Church additional benefits not available to the three other groups with which it has agreements: Muslims, Protestants, and Jews. Groups without agreements may register with the government and receive some benefits.

Between July 2022 and April, the ombudsman-led expert’s commission, approved by the parliament in March 2022 to investigate sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, received 487 complaints. In October, the commission released its report and 20 recommendations. The report emphasized that religious, educational, and government institutions must improve their prevention and protection methods; encouraged additional training for prosecutors, law enforcement, and medical specialists; and recommended establishing a state fund to compensate victims. In January, the Council of Ministers approved the *2023-30 National Action Plan* to implement the *EU Strategy on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life*. The plan aims to prevent and combat antisemitism, promote conditions that allow Jewish communities to live according to their beliefs and traditions, and increase research and training on religious hate crimes and religious tolerance.

According to the Ministry of the Interior’s 2022 annual report on hate crimes, the most recent data available, there were 47 hate crimes based on religious beliefs or practices and, separately, 13 motivated by antisemitism in 2022, compared with 63 and 11 such crimes, respectively, in 2021.

U.S. embassy and consulate general representatives met with national and regional government officials to discuss antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, concerns about societal discrimination, religiously motivated hate crimes, and hate speech against religious minorities. Embassy and consulate officials also met with several religious groups and civil society organizations regarding discrimination and the free exercise of their religious rights. In March, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism participated in the International Meeting of Special Envoys and Coordinators Combatting Antisemitism in Madrid. On March 30, the embassy and consulate both hosted iftars that brought together interfaith groups to celebrate religious freedom and diversity by discussing how to build bridges among religious groups, break stereotypes, and mitigate discrimination. Throughout the year, the embassy and consulate general celebrated religious freedom and diversity on social media platforms.

Section I.

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 47.2 million (midyear 2023). According to a survey conducted in September by the governmental Center for Sociological Research (CIS), 52 percent of respondents identify as Catholic and 2.4 percent as followers of other religious groups. In the same survey, 12.9 percent described themselves as “nonbelievers,” 14.4 percent as agnostics, and 16.8 percent as atheists. The remaining 1.6 percent did not answer the question.

In 2017, the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference of Spain estimated there were 32.6 million Catholics, although the CIS survey and news reports indicate the number has decreased to 24.5 million since that time. The Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) estimates there are 2.3 million Muslims; the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) estimates there are 1.7 million Protestants; the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE) estimates there are 45,000 Jews; the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal, an umbrella organization for various Orthodox churches, stated in 2014 there were 1.5 million Orthodox Christians; Jehovah's Witnesses estimate there are 122,000 members; the Buddhist Union of Spain-Federation of Buddhist Entities (Buddhist Union) estimates there are 110,000 Buddhists; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) reports there are 63,524 members. Other religious groups include Christian Scientists, other Christian groups, Hindus (50,000 members), Church of Scientology (11,000 members), and the Baha'i Community of Spain (5,000 members). The autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa contain the highest percentages of non-Christians; nearly 50 percent of the population in both cities is Muslim.

Section II.

Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for freedom of religion and worship for individuals and communities. The constitution states no one may be compelled to testify about his or her religion or beliefs. It also states, "No religion shall have a state character," but "public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and consequently maintain appropriate cooperative relations with the Catholic Church and other denominations." The Catholic Church is the only religious group explicitly mentioned in the constitution. Under the penal code, it is a crime to prevent or disrupt religious services or to offend or scorn religious beliefs, ceremonies, or practitioners. The constitution allows limits on expression if "necessary to maintain public order."

The law imposes a sentence of between eight to 12 months against an individual who offends the feelings of members of a religious group, publicly disparages the dogmas, beliefs, rights, or ceremonies of a religious group, or publicly insults members of a religious group. The law imposes the same penalties against an individual who publicly disparages those who do not profess any religion or belief. The law also imposes a six-month to one-year prison sentence or a fine against anyone who perpetrates "profane acts" in a place of worship or at religious ceremonies that "offend the feelings" of persons belonging to legally protected religions.

The penal code's definition of hate crimes includes acts of "humiliation or disrespect" against victims because of their religion, with penalties of one to four years in prison. Antisemitism is specifically defined in the penal code as a hate crime. By law, authorities may investigate and prosecute criminal offenses committed by neo-Nazi groups as terrorist crimes. Genocide denial is a crime if it incites violent attitudes, such as aggressive, threatening behavior or language. The law requires public school curricula to include instruction regarding the Holocaust in addition to other historical events and conflicts that involve serious human rights violations. The law also provides for a "Declaration of Reparation and Personal Recognition" for those who experienced violence or persecution for political, ideological, or religious beliefs during the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War or the subsequent dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

The law establishes an independent oversight authority to monitor cases of discrimination based on a range of categories, including religious beliefs. The law imposes fines of up to €500,000 (\$550,000) for violators.

The government does not require religious groups to register, but registration confers on religious groups certain legal benefits. Groups registered in the Registry of Religious Entities maintained by the Office of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament, and Democratic Memory (Ministry of the Presidency) may buy, rent, and sell property, and may act as a legal entity in civil proceedings. Registration entails completing forms available on the ministry's website and providing notarized documentation of the foundational and operational statutes of the religious group, its legal representatives, territorial scope, religious purposes, and address. All persons or groups have the right to practice their religion regardless of whether the community of which they are members is registered as a religious entity. New religious communities may register directly with the Ministry of the Presidency, or religious associations may register on their behalf.

The government maintains a bilateral agreement with the Holy See, executed in part by the Episcopal Conference of Spain. The Episcopal Conference interacts with the government on behalf of the entire Catholic community. While other religious groups are required to register each place of worship, per an agreement with the Holy See, individual Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register with the government. The Catholic Church is the only religious entity to which persons may elect to allocate a percentage of their taxes. On March 29, the Council of Ministers approved an amendment to the government's bilateral agreement with the Holy See to exclude tax exemptions related to construction and installation projects and special contributions.

The government also has cooperation agreements with CIE, FEREDE, and FCJE. These agreements with the country's four predominant religions – Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Judaism – are legally binding and provide the religious groups with certain tax exemptions and the ability to buy and sell property, open a house of worship, and conduct other legal business. The agreements also grant civil validity to weddings performed by clergy and permit the placement of teachers of religion in schools and chaplains in hospitals, the military, and prisons. Groups with cooperation agreements are also eligible for independently administered government grants. The agreements cover legal, educational, cultural, and economic affairs; religious observance by members of the armed forces; and the military service of clergy and members of religious orders.

Registered groups that wish to sign cooperation agreements with the state must first acquire *notorio arraigo* ("deeply rooted" or permanent) status through the Ministry of the Presidency's Office of Religious Affairs. To achieve this status, groups must have an unspecified "relevant" number of followers, a presence in the country for at least 30 years, and a "level of diffusion" in the general population that the government considers demonstrates a "social presence," which is not further defined. Groups must also submit documentation demonstrating the group is religious in nature to the Office of Religious Affairs, which maintains the Register of Religious Entities. Jehovah's Witnesses, the Buddhist Union, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal, and, as of September, the Baha'i Community of Spain are registered religions with *notorio arraigo* status.

If the Office of Religious Affairs deems an applicant for registration a nonreligious group, the applicant may instead be included in the Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of the Interior. Inclusion in the associations register grants legal status but confers no other benefits. Registration itself simply lists the association and its history in the government's database. Registration as an association is a precursor to requesting that the government deem the association to be of public benefit, which affords the same tax benefits as charities, including exemption from income tax and taxes on contributions. For such a classification, the association must be registered for two years and maintain a net positive fiscal balance.

The Pluralism and Coexistence Coalition (FPC) is a governmental entity attached to the Ministry of the Presidency that promotes religious freedom and diversity. It provides funding to non-Catholic religious denominations that have a cooperation agreement with the government in support of activities that promote cultural, educational, and social integration. It provides nonfinancial assistance to other religious groups registered with the government to increase public awareness. The foundation also promotes dialogue and rapprochement among religious groups and the integration of religion in society. It works closely with the Office of Religious Affairs.

The government funds religious services within the prison system for Catholic and Muslim groups, including Sunday Catholic Mass, Catholic confession, and Friday Islamic prayer. The cooperation agreements of FCJE and FEREDÉ with the government do not include provisions for publicly funded services. These groups provide religious services in prisons at their own expense. Other religious groups registered as religious entities with the Office of Religious Affairs may provide services at their own expense during visiting hours upon the request of prisoners.

The government guarantees access to centers for asylum seekers and refugees for religious workers of groups with cooperation agreements with the state so that these groups may provide direct assistance, at their expense, to their followers in the centers. Religious workers from groups without a cooperation agreement with the government may enter internment centers upon request to the Ministry of the Presidency.

Military rules and cooperation agreements with the government allow religious military funerals and chaplain services for Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, and Jews, should the family of the deceased request them. Other religious groups may conduct religious military funerals upon request.

The government recognizes marriages performed by all religious communities with notorio arraigo status. Members of religious groups without this status must marry in a civil ceremony for the marriage to be legally recognized.

The regions of Madrid and Catalonia maintain agreements with several religious groups that have accords with the national government. These regional agreements permit activities such as providing religious assistance in hospitals and prisons under regional jurisdiction. The central government funds these services for the military, and the regional governments fund hospital and prison services. According to the central government, these subnational agreements may not contradict the principles of the federal agreements, which take precedence.

Religious groups must apply to local governments for a license to open a place of worship or other establishments intended for public use. Requirements may vary from municipality to municipality, except in the autonomous communities of Catalonia and Pais Vasco, which have specific regulations for license requirements. The documentation required to apply for a license is usually the same as for other business establishments seeking to open a venue for public use and includes information such as architectural plans and maximum capacity. Religious groups must also inform the Office of Religious Affairs after opening new places of worship.

Local governments are obligated to consider requests for use of public land to open a place of worship. If a municipality decides to deny such a request after weighing factors such as availability and value added to the community, the city council must explain its decision to the requesting party.

The law requires a minimum of 10 interested students to initiate new religious education classes in public schools for religions other than Catholicism. As outlined in the cooperation agreements with religious groups, the government provides funding for salaries of teachers of Catholic religious education classes in public schools and, when at least 10 students request an Islamic or a Protestant religious education class, funding for Islamic and Protestant teachers. The Jewish community is also eligible for government funding for Jewish instructors but has declined funding. Religious education remains optional. Students who elect not to take religious education courses are required to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes. Regional governments are responsible for developing curricula and financing teachers for religious education, with the exception of Andalusia, Aragon, the Canary Islands, Cantabria, and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, which leave the curricula and financing of religious education to the national government in accordance with their respective regional statutes.

Autonomous regions generally have the authority to develop the requirements for religious education instructors and certify their credentials, although some defer to the national government. Prospective instructors must provide personal data, proof that the educational authority of the region where they are applying to work has never dismissed them, a degree as required by the

region, and any other requirements as stipulated by the religious association to which they correspond. The religious associations must provide a list of approved instructors to the government. Ministry of Education-approved CIE guidelines stress instruction in “moderate Islam” in worship practices, with emphasis on pluralism, understanding, religious tolerance, conflict resolution, and coexistence. CIE also requires instructors to have a certificate of training in Islamic education. Private religious schools, regardless of whether they receive public funds, must comply with governmental education regulations. Private religious schools that do not receive public funds must obtain additional authorization from regional educational authorities to function.

Catholic and Jewish clergy may include time spent on missions abroad in calculations for social security. Protestant clergy are eligible to receive social security benefits, including health insurance and a government-provided retirement pension with a maximum credit of 15 years of service, but pension distributions for these clergy are more restrictive than for Catholic clergy, who are entitled to a government-provided pension that covers their entire career up to a maximum of 38.5 years of service. Muslim, Orthodox, and Jehovah’s Witnesses clergy are also eligible for social security benefits under the terms of separate social security agreements each of these groups negotiated with the state.

The ombudsman is the high commissioner of the parliament in charge of defending the fundamental rights and public liberties of citizens by supervising the activity of the country’s public administrations. The ombudsman enjoys inviolability and immunity in the exercise of the office’s duties.

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Abuses Involving Violence, Detention, or Mass Resettlement

Between July 2022 and April, the ombudsman-led expert’s commission, approved by the parliament in March 2022 to investigate sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, received 487 complaints. In October, the commission released its findings detailing the consequences of the abuse, including victims of abuse experiencing post-traumatic stress, symptoms of depression, and suicidal thoughts, and criticizing the Catholic Church for not providing sufficient support to victims during investigations. The report urged the Catholic Church to acknowledge the severity of the issue, recognize victims, and increase victim support during legal processes. The report also contained 20 recommendations, which emphasized that religious, educational, and government institutions must improve their prevention and protection methods; encouraged additional training for prosecutors, law enforcement, medical specialists, and Catholic institution members; and recommended establishing a state-run victims compensation fund and a temporary “special body” focused on making amends with victims within the Catholic Church who could not pursue criminal action. In November, in response to the report’s recommendations, the Episcopal Conference of Spain reported it would work with the government to implement a victim compensation fund as long as it was for “all victims [of sexual abuse], not only those of the church.”

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

Various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to call for the government to reform the part of the penal code that criminalizes offending “religious sentiments,” which, they stated, unduly restricted freedom of expression. Some organizations said the laws criminalizing public statements disparaging religious beliefs equated to criminalizing blasphemy. In September, the far-left Sumar political party filed a legislative proposal in parliament to remove the criminalization of offenses against “religious sentiments” from the penal code.

Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others

CIE continued to express concern about the lack of cemeteries with dedicated plots for Islamic burials in four of the country's 17 autonomous communities (Cantabria, Castile-La Mancha, Extremadura, and Galicia) and stated the number of cemeteries were insufficient for the country's Muslim population. The number of Islamic cemeteries increased from 36 to 42 between 2021 and 2023.

On December 1, FEREDE filed an appeal with the High Courts of Murcia against the City Council of Lorca, a municipality within the autonomous community of Murcia, for an amendment to its Urban Development Plan approved on January 3. The amendment required religious establishments to be in buildings exclusively for worship and meet certain accessibility requirements, including a certain number of toilets and parking facilities. FEDERE expressed concern that the new requirements hindered religious institutions from opening new places of worship. The appeal was pending at year's end.

An appeal filed in the Constitutional Court in September 2022 by the far-right political party Vox against a 2022 law that criminalized obstructing a woman's ability to voluntarily terminate a pregnancy or health care professionals' ability to assist with the termination of a pregnancy remained unresolved at year's end. Violations of the law are punishable by fines and up to one year's imprisonment. The NGO Observatory for Freedom of Religion and Conscience stated in 2022 that the law would prohibit praying outside of abortion clinics and unduly restrict freedom of expression and freedom of religion. In June 2022, without specifically mentioning the law, the Episcopal Conference of Spain issued a statement denouncing "legislative projects" against the "defense of life."

In December 2022, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training reported the number of students taking religious courses in primary and secondary schools continued to decrease during the 2021-22 school year. Several other religious groups cited continuing obstacles to providing religious education and integrating religion teachers in schools, given the legal requirement for a minimum of 10 interested students to initiate non-Catholic religious education classes in public schools. Although the number of Islamic educators increased from 106 in 2022 to 144 in 2023, school systems continued to face a shortage of Islamic educators. According to CIE, there were five autonomous communities without Islamic studies courses in public schools: Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia, Murcia, and Navarre. The 2022 Andalusian Observatory and Union of Islamic Communities of Spain report estimated that 90 percent of Muslim students in the country were unable to access Islamic studies. CIE does not arrange for religious classes outside of schools. CIE urges parents to submit applications to the schools where their children study, ticking the box for Islamic religious education, in order to encourage the hiring of Islamic religious teachers.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Non-Catholic religious groups continued to express concern about what they said was unequal legal treatment by the government. According to media outlets, one in three Spaniards chose to allocate some of their taxes to the Catholic Church during the year, yielding over €320 million (\$352.4 million), an 8.5 percent increase in donations compared with 2021. Other religious groups were not listed on the tax form as potential recipients of funds. Several religious groups, including Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and the Church of Jesus Christ, continued to express their desire to have their groups included on the tax form. They said they would prefer to receive voluntary contributions from taxpayers without preconditions rather than relying on funding from the FPC, which has specific conditions for use of its funds.

CIE, FEREDE, and FCJE relied on government funds provided through the FPC to cover their administrative and infrastructure costs. The Ministry of the Presidency continued to allocate funding to different groups according to the number of their registered entities and the approximate number of adherents. In January, it provided FEREDE with €526,780 (\$580,000), CIE with

€433,130 (\$477,000), and FCJE with €210,712 (\$232,000). In addition to infrastructure and administrative funding, foundation funds also covered small publicity and research projects.

The Ministry of Justice continued processing applications under the 2015 law that provided descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country more than 500 years earlier the right of return as full Spanish citizens, if the applications were submitted before the law's expiration in September 2019. According to the latest data available from the Ministry of Justice, the government had granted citizenship to 71,795 descendants of Sephardic Jews and rejected 6,818 applications as of September 30. Of the rejected applicants, 1,021 had submitted appeals.

In January, the Council of Ministers approved the *2023-30 National Action Plan* to implement the *EU Strategy on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life*. The plan aims to prevent and combat antisemitism, promote conditions that allow Jewish communities to live according to their beliefs and traditions, and increase research and training on religious hate crimes and religious tolerance.

On February 8, Barcelona's former mayor Ada Colau officially suspended the sister city agreement established in 1998 between Barcelona and Tel Aviv. Colau's unilateral decision was widely criticized by Spanish government officials, including the Barcelona City Council. In June, Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai formally requested that newly elected Barcelona Mayor Jaume Collboni restore relations. Mayor Collboni reinstated the sister city agreement on September 1.

On October 2, Jehovah's Witnesses won a case against the newspaper *El Mundo*, which a court found published a defamatory article in November 2022 on the religious organization based on false information provided by the Association of Victims of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Provincial Court of Torrejón de Ardoz, a municipality in the autonomous community of Madrid, found the article "generated verifiable damages" to the Jehovah's Witnesses and that "from any point of view, the article mentions allegations by third parties that cause undeniable damage to the religious association." In its decision, the court ordered *El Mundo* to publish the Jehovah's Witnesses' reply to the article and to pay the Jehovah's Witnesses' litigation fees.

On April 25, the Ministry of the Presidency reached an agreement with Jehovah's Witnesses, the Buddhist Union, the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal on a proposal for the government to provide tax benefits similar to those received by FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE. The proposal was halted in parliament in July due to national elections and the ongoing Spanish government formation process. The Buddhist Union reported the initiative, if approved, would improve equal treatment between religious organizations with notorious arraigo status and those with agreements with the Spanish government (see section 2).

The FPC and Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces continued to promote religious diversity and increase local governments' capacity to protect religious freedom through a joint project announced in 2021. The project seeks to help local governments better manage religious diversity in a democratic and inclusive manner by sharing best practices and giving local governments access to expert consultants. As of year's end, 22 municipalities were participating in the project.

The FPC continued outreach campaigns, including organizing an exhibition titled "Neither New nor Foreign: Religious Diversity in Spain," aimed at promoting a better understanding of the history of religious diversity in Spain and respect for religious freedom. The FPC continued working with religious groups on the opening and operation of places of worship, the impact of religious education, and the effects of discrimination and limits to religious freedom in the workplace. The Office of Religious Affairs maintained a variety of online resources, including a directory of all registered religious communities and places of worship and a dictionary with visual and auditory elements aimed at enriching the understanding of religious diversity. The Ministry of the Interior's Office on Hate Crimes continued to provide assistance to victims of religiously motivated hate crimes and training for law enforcement.

The Ministry of the Interior continued to implement measures to address hate crimes, including those carried out based on religious belief, by enhancing support for victims, providing training and resources to law enforcement, and increasing cooperation with NGOs and other organizations working to combat hate crimes through its *Second Action Plan to Combat Hate Crimes*. The plan is funded and in effect through 2024.

Several regional and municipal government offices continued to conduct outreach with the stated goal of promoting religious diversity. In September, the Office of Religious Affairs of the Catalan regional government published the *2022 Map of Religions in Catalonia*, identifying a total of 7,291 places of worship in the region comprising 14 religious groups. The Catalan Office of Religious Freedom awarded a total of one million euros (1.06 million dollars) in grants to 76 religious communities' refurbishment and improvement projects. The grants were aimed at improving the safety, hygiene, and accessibility of places of worship, as well as their compliance with regulations.

The Barcelona City Council's Office for Religious Affairs and Office for Non-Discrimination facilitated and promoted religious celebrations and provided grants for projects of various religious groups. The municipal government organized roundtables to discuss the status of religious freedom in the city and convened inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue groups aimed at breaking down prejudices toward religious practices and improving social cohesion.

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

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Ministry of the Interior's 2022 annual report on hate crimes, the most recent available data, there were 47 hate crimes based on religious beliefs or practices and, separately, 13 motivated by antisemitism in 2022, compared with 63 and 11 such crimes, respectively, in 2021. Only crimes involving antisemitism and anti-Roma sentiment were disaggregated, as the penal code treats those as distinct offenses. The highest number of religiously motivated crimes occurred in the autonomous communities of Madrid (11 hate crimes based on religious beliefs, and six related to antisemitism), Andalusia (nine and zero antisemitism crimes), Catalonia (four and three), and Valencia (six and zero). The ministry's report did not cite specific examples or provide a breakdown of religiously motivated incidents by type of crime. According to a ministry official, the figures in the annual report only included officially filed complaints and not incidents gathered from press reports.

The public prosecutor's 2022 annual report reported no new prosecutions in that year for hate crimes involving religion, compared to one in 2021.

According to the latest published report from the Observatory for Freedom of Religion and Conscience, released in November, there were 208 incidents described as violating religious freedom in 2022, 13 more incidents than in 2021. Of these incidents, 175 (85 percent) targeted Catholics, three targeted Muslims, three targeted Jews, and 27 were classified as being against several or all faiths. There were three incidents of violence, 34 attacks on places of worship, and 24 cases of harassment of believers.

The FCJE's Observatory of Antisemitism reported multiple antisemitic incidents, including 400 antisemitic publications on social media platforms from November 2022 to May. FCJE reported an increase in antisemitic incidents after the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack in Israel, stating it was "the greatest escalation of antisemitism in Spain in recent times." According to FCJE's Observatory of Antisemitism, acts of antisemitism included drawings of swastikas on mailboxes of Jewish families, graffiti on synagogues and cemeteries, increased security threats to Jewish schools, and demonstrations in front of a hotel in Barcelona. The FCJE reported on a call by a political party (Podemos) to boycott companies that cooperate with Israel (Carrefour), humiliating treatment by a

teacher of a Spanish-Israeli student, and a boycott against Jewish-owned businesses in Melilla. The Observatory for Freedom of Religion and Conscience reported that there was an increase in incidents described as violating religious freedom targeting Jews and Muslims from 2022 to 2023.

On April 3, a Barcelona court sentenced a man to 18 months in prison and a fine for hate speech for his role in an October 2021 demonstration by an estimated 200 persons reportedly associated with far-right groups. In the complaint, the prosecutor said the man was motivated by his aversion to Jews and Israel and led prolonged antisemitic chants with incitement to hate, violence, and harassment against the Jewish community, including “death to Jews,” “kill Jews,” and “death to Israel.” Shortly after the verdict, the court suspended the sentence under the condition that the man not commit further criminal activity for the next two years and participate in a rehabilitation program on preventing violent behavior and promoting equal treatment and non-discrimination.

On October 18, following a pro-Palestinian rally in Melilla, a group of demonstrators entered several Jewish shops shouting at, intimidating, and insulting employees and customers. The group also went to the Jewish synagogue in Melilla and shouted insults including “murderous Israel.” Law enforcement officials prevented the group from breaking into the synagogue and those inside had to wait until the police cleared the scene before leaving.

On October 20, a group of fans verbally attacked Israeli soccer player Shon Weissman from the Granada Spanish soccer club, with phrases including “Weissman, die” and “Palestine Aurrera (Palestine Forward)” during a soccer match. In response, Movement Against Intolerance, a human rights NGO, filed a complaint with the State Commission against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance in Sport within the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports.

In May, the U.S.-based NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued the results of its survey of antisemitic prejudice in Spain, based on data collected in November and December 2022. The survey asked approximately 500 respondents whether 11 stereotypical statements about Jews were “probably true.” Based on responses, ADL estimated 26 percentage of all individuals over 18 in Spain agreed that six or more statements were “probably true,” compared with 28 percent in 2019 and 29 percent in 2015. Among the statements were: “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Spain” (56 percent); “Jews have too much power in international financial markets” (42 percent); “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust” (40 percent); “Jews don’t care about what happens to anyone but their own kind” (29 percent); “Jews have too much control over the global media” (23 percent); and “Jews are responsible for most of the world’s wars” (9 percent).

Muslim leaders noted that incidents of anti-Muslim hatred had increased since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, including hate speech on social media platforms and discrimination. The Ministry of Inclusion reported that 85 percent of recorded hate speech on online platforms was related to anti-Muslim hatred while 5 to 10 percent was related to antisemitism. Muslim leaders further reported that incidents of anti-Muslim hatred were underreported, noting the Muslim population in Spain tended to not report incidents of discrimination or hate crimes because of fear of stigmatization from non-Muslims and mistrust of government institutions. They further noted the lack of reliable data made it difficult to design policies with funding to address anti-Muslim hatred in the country.

On January 25, Spanish authorities arrested Moroccan national Yassin Kanja after he killed one individual and injured another with a machete at two churches in Algeciras, a port city in the autonomous community of Andalusia. The suspect faced one count of “aggravated murder with terrorist intent” and several aggravated bodily harm charges. In a statement, the High Court said, “the evidence gathered supports classifying the acts of Yassin Kanjaa as a jihadist attack directed both against priests who profess the faith of the Catholic Church and against Muslims who, in his view, do not follow the precepts of the Quran” and concluded in September that Kanja committed an act of terrorism. In October, a psychiatric report indicated that the suspect suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and other psychological disorders that could have influenced his actions at the time of the attack. The trial had not commenced by year’s end.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported an increase in hate crimes citing 12 incidents of vandalism and 12 acts of assault towards members during worship since September 2022. Of the 24 incidents, nine occurred in the autonomous community of Catalonia, five in Andalusia, and two each in Galicia and Navarre. The religious organization expressed concerns about false news reports inciting hate crime against Jehovah's Witnesses. On March 23, an aggressor approached two Jehovah's Witnesses managing an information booth in the autonomous community of Valencia and began to verbally attack them. When one of the Jehovah's Witness picked up the phone to call the police, the aggressor took the phone and physically attacked him, causing an injury that later required surgery. On October 23, two aggressors entered a Jehovah's Witness place of worship in the autonomous community of Asturias during a ceremony yelling insults and urinating at those worshipping.

The Simone Viel Chair, established through a May 2022 agreement between the FJCE and Complutense University of Madrid, continued to promote the prevention of antisemitism and racism and promote intercultural dialogue, human rights, and the rule of law.

In March, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Catalan regional government published *The Guide for Respecting Religious Freedom and Conscience in Labor Relations* and organized a seminar in October with representatives from labor unions and business associations to address the impact religious expressions, such as fasting and celebrations, specific clothing or symbols, and food management, have on various aspects of the employment relationship.

From September to December, the Sefarad-Israel Center, a Spanish public consortium under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation, held an exhibition, "The Golden Age of the Jews of Alandalus," in Madrid in collaboration with the World Jewish Congress. The exhibition included a series of documents and activities that highlighted Jewish history in Spain from the second half of the eighth century until the end of the eleventh century.

In October, the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue, a Catalan NGO, organized its eighth "Night of Religions" in Barcelona, in which 49 places of worship representing 18 different religious groups opened their doors to local residents. More than 3,500 persons took part in the activities. Following the success of the Barcelona program, the organization hosted similar events in the cities of Tarragona, Vilafranca del Penedes, and Sant Cugat. The association continued to lead interreligious dialogue groups in 14 cities in the region bringing together religious leaders from different faiths to discuss religious diversity, foster social cohesion, and create neighborhood joint projects.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy and consulate general representatives met with various national and regional government officials as well as the Office of the Ombudsman to discuss antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities, religiously motivated hate crimes, and hate speech against religious minorities. Issues discussed also included the government's new initiatives to promote religious pluralism.

Embassy and consulate officials also met with several religious groups and civil society organizations regarding discrimination and the free exercise of their religious rights. Other issues discussed included religious education, including access to that education, as well as religiously motivated hate crimes and hate speech.

In January, embassy and consulate officials participated in several Holocaust Remembrance Month events, including events hosted by the Spanish Senate, Catalan parliament, Barcelona City Council, Jewish Organization of Madrid, and Assembly of Madrid. The U.S. embassy and consulate general amplified social media content recognizing International Holocaust Remembrance Day, including Holocaust discussion materials.

In March, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism participated in the International Meeting of Special Envoys and Coordinators Combatting Antisemitism in Madrid. Also in March, a senior embassy official and the Special Envoy attended a lunch with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the World Jewish Congress Executive Committee. Other State Department officials met with the Sefarad-Israel Center and the Office of Religious Affairs to discuss national strategies and action plans to combat antisemitism and improve Jewish life.

On March 30, the U.S. embassy and consulate general hosted iftar dinners for Muslim community leaders and other religious leaders across Spain. The dinners brought together interfaith groups to celebrate religious freedom and diversity by discussing how to build bridges among religious groups, break stereotypes, and mitigate discrimination. Both events highlighted the importance of religious freedom and respect for religious minorities.

From October to December, the Ambassador led diplomatic corps efforts to promote religious freedom, foster dialogue, and coordinate efforts to address the challenges faced by different religious communities as a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Throughout the year the U.S. embassy and consulate general celebrated religious freedom and diversity on social media platforms, including by marking occasions such as International Religious Freedom Day and honoring religious celebrations including Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Hanukkah, Passover, Kwanzaa, Yom Kippur, Diwali, Holy Week, and Christmas.