

2023 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” if they are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination based on religion. It does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. According to the constitution, matters concerning the personal and family status of Muslims come under the jurisdiction of sharia courts. Under the predominant Sunni interpretations of sharia, converts from Islam are regarded as apostates but still considered Muslims and therefore subject to sharia as such. Islamic religious groups are granted recognition through the constitution and do not need to register with the government. Non-Islamic religious groups must obtain official recognition through registration. In September, the country enacted a cybercrimes law that penalizes the use of a website, social media network, or information network to “disrespect religion” with a term of imprisonment not less than three months and a fine of up to 50,000 dinars (\$71,000).

Converts from Islam to Christianity continued to report security officials questioned them regarding their religious beliefs and practices as well as some instances of surveillance. They reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their “true” religious beliefs and practices. The Ministry of Awqaf [religious endowments], Islamic Affairs, and Holy Places (MOA) continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary that the government had not approved. The government continued to deny official recognition to some religious groups, including Baha’is and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Members of some unregistered religious groups continued to face problems registering their marriages and the religious affiliation of their children as well as in renewing their residency permits. Some religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Throughout the year, King Abdullah publicly met with leaders from various Christian denominations.

Some converts to Christianity from Islam continued to report social ostracism as well as physical and verbal abuse from their families and communities, and many worshipped in secret due to the social stigma they faced. Some converts reported persistent threats of violence from family members concerned with protecting their traditional conceptions of honor. Atheists and some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Converts from Christianity to Islam also reported social stigma from their families and Christian society. Christian women married to Muslim men were more often stigmatized. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination. Religious leaders reported continued online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and those advocating religious moderation, frequently through social media, though some religious leaders believe there will be a reduction in such discourse due to provisions penalizing it in the cybercrimes law. Some social media users defended interfaith inclusivity, with posts condemning content that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue. Observers continued to report friction between Christian denominations that the government had recognized and those that it had not. Several Jewish travelers reported they perceived antisemitic practices, such as border authorities confiscating religious items at ports of entry. A border official stated that the country admits travelers from Israel in accordance with the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty and Jordanian law. In reference to instances of mistreatment of Jewish visitors at the border, officials have said that when it imposes restrictions, it does so “to preserve the safety of visitors while in Jordan.” In May, a Palestinian journalist wrote an article in the newspaper *Al-Dustour* in which he described “Zionist Jews” as “the descendants of apes and pigs.”

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including with the MOA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and Royal Hashemite Court, to raise issues relating to the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith inclusivity. Embassy officers also engaged with Muslim scholars, Christian community leaders and members, and representatives of unrecognized religious groups to promote interfaith pluralism and dialogue. The embassy supported programs promoting religious tolerance, as well as civil society programs seeking to preserve the cultural heritage of religious minorities. The embassy hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing religious and community leaders together to discuss the country's interfaith legacy and how to continue promoting respect and inclusivity within faith communities.

Section I.

Religious Demography ✓

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11.1 million (mid-year 2023). According to U.S. government estimates, Muslims, virtually all of whom are Sunni, make up 97.1 percent of the population, while Christians make up 2.1 percent. Church leaders estimate that the size of the Christian community ranges from approximately 1.8 percent to as high as 3 percent of the country's population. Groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, and Druze (who are considered Muslims by the government). According to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS), there is also a small community (consisting of a few migrant families) of Zoroastrians and Yezidis.

Most of the more than one million migrant workers in the country are from Egypt, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia are often Christian or Hindu. An estimated 731,000 refugees and other displaced persons are registered with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from approximately 50 countries of origin, including more than 653,000 Syrians, 57,000 Iraqis, 12,000 Yemenis, and 5,000 Sudanese. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates that 2.4 million Palestinians are registered with UNRWA in the country, the majority of whom have Jordanian nationality. The government states 1.4 million Syrians are present in the country. The Syrian and Iraqi refugee populations are mostly Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims and Christians account for a small number of Syrian refugees and 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," if they are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion and states the King must be a Muslim. The constitution allows for religious courts, including sharia courts for Muslims and ecclesiastical courts for Christian denominations recognized by the government. According to the General Iftaa Department, the office responsible for issuing religious guidance in the form of fatwas, sharia courts follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence in adjudicating personal status cases.

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 allow sharia courts to determine civil status affairs for Muslims; these courts do not recognize converts from Islam to other religions. Under sharia, converts from Islam and their children are considered Muslim apostates and are still subject to sharia. Neither the penal code nor the criminal code specifies a penalty for apostasy. Sharia courts have jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and individuals declared as apostates may have their marriages annulled or be disinherited, except in the case 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 Church Leaders (CCL), a government advisory body comprising the heads of the country's 11 officially recognized Christian denominations, before converting a Christian to Islam to make sure the conversion is based on religious conviction and not for purposes of marriage or divorce.

The penal code contains articles criminalizing acts such as incitement of hatred, blasphemy against Abrahamic faiths, undermining the regime, or portraying citizens in a manner that violates their dignity. The penal code criminalizes insulting the Prophet Muhammad, punishable by one to three years' imprisonment. Written works, speeches, and actions intended to cause or resulting in sectarian strife, including conflicts between religious groups, are punishable by one to three years' imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 200 dinars (\$280). In September, the government enacted a cybercrimes law that penalizes the use of a website, social media network, or information network to "disrespect religion" or spread disinformation. Offenders face punishment with a term of imprisonment not less than three months and a fine of up to 50,000 dinars (\$71,000). The law also provides a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding 20 dinars (\$28) for anyone who publishes anything that offends religious feelings or beliefs and for anyone who speaks within earshot of another person in a public space and offends that individual's beliefs.

Authorities may prosecute individuals who proselytize Muslims under the penal code's provisions against "inciting sectarian conflict" or "harming the national unity." Both offenses are punishable by imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to 200 dinars (\$280).

Islamic religious groups are granted recognition through the constitution and do not need to register with the government. Non-Islamic religious groups must obtain official recognition through registration. If registered as "denominations," they may administer rites such as marriage and establish ecclesiastical courts. Recognized religious groups may also own land, open bank accounts, and enter into contracts. Religious groups may alternatively be registered as "religious entities." Religious entities must work through ecclesiastical courts of recognized denominations on matters such as divorce and inheritance, but they otherwise have all other rights as recognized denominations, such as conducting marriages, owning property, and opening bank accounts. Members of Christian churches recognized under the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations, as well as members of denominations registered as religious entities, may take their denomination-issued marriage certificates to the Civil Status Bureau to receive their government marriage certificates. Recognized denominations and religious entities generally do not need government approval to accept funding from parent churches or certain Christian charities or organizations based outside of the country. Recognized non-Islamic religious groups are tax-exempt but do not receive the government subsidies granted to Islamic religious groups.

Religious groups that the government does not recognize as denominations or religious entities 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 on behalf of the unrecognized group. To register as a recognized religious denomination, the group must submit its bylaws, a list of its members, its budget, and information regarding its religious doctrine to the Ministry of Interior and Prime Ministry. In determining whether to register or recognize Christian groups, the Prime Minister confers with the Ministry of Interior and the CCL. Although neither the law nor the constitution explicitly mandate the practice, church and government leaders have stated that the CCL must endorse recognition for new Christian groups prior to the Prime Minister's approval. To achieve official recognition as denominations, the Ministry of Interior must recommend Christian groups and the cabinet must approve. 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 Protestants), 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 but unspecified number of citizens.

An annex to the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations 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 religious entities but not as religious denominations and, as a result, none have been permitted to establish an ecclesiastical court: the Free Evangelical Church, Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptist Church. Religious groups such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah's Witnesses are not registered and gather in semi-official or unofficial meetings places. The government improved the ability of the Church of Jesus Christ to operate by granting it legal status as a charitable association through its Latter-day Saint Charities in 2018 and permitted members to gather in semi-official meeting spaces owned by the charity. However, the government requires Church of Jesus Christ members to obtain marriage certificates through officially recognized Christian denominations and does not allow the Church of Jesus Christ to independently own buildings or establish bank accounts.

The CCL serves as an administrative body to facilitate tax and customs exemptions, as well as to issue civil documents related to 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. Unrecognized Christian groups do not have representatives on the CCL, have no legal status as religious entities, and must have individual members of their groups conduct business with the government on their behalf. The Greek Orthodox Archbishop permanently chairs the presidency of the CCL.

The King appoints and can dismiss, without consulting the cabinet, the chief justice, the head of the Sharia Judicial Council, the Grand Mufti, and senior royal court officials.

According to the constitution, a special provision of the law regulates the activities and administration of finances of the Islamic awqaf. Per this provision of the law, the Ministry of Awqaf manages mosques, appoints imams, pays mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain mosque-sponsored activities, such as holiday celebrations and religious observances. Other Islamic institutions are the General Iftaa Department, which issues fatwas; the Supreme (Sharia) Justice Department, headed by the Office of the Supreme (Sharia) Justice (OSJ) and in charge of the Sharia Public Prosecution; the Sharia Courts; and the Sharia Institute.

The government mandates imams to adhere to officially prescribed themes for Friday sermons, while allowing flexibility in style and delivery. Muslim clergy who do not follow government policy may face suspension, a written warning, a ban from delivering Friday sermons for a certain period, or dismissal from the Ministry of Awqaf. In addition to these administrative measures, a preacher who violates the law may face imprisonment for a period of one week to one month or a fine not to exceed 20 dinars (\$28).

The law forbids any Islamic cleric from issuing a fatwa without authorization from an official committee headed by the Grand Mufti in the General Iftaa Department. This department is independent from the Ministry of Awqaf, with the rank of Grand Mufti equal to that of a government minister.

The law prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult "founders of religion or prophets" or that are deemed contemptuous of "any of the religions whose freedom is protected by

the constitution,” and it imposes a fine on violators of up to 20,000 dinars (\$28,200). The government’s Media Commission regulates the publishing and distribution of all books and media. If the Media Commission deems passages “violate public norms and values, are religiously offensive, or are insulting to the King,” it can ban the entry and distribution of the book in the country.

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 which, according to the legal code, includes religious groups recognized as denominations and entities) 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.” To operate a school, religious institutions must receive permission from the Ministry of Education, which ensures the curriculum meets national standards. The ministry does not oversee religious courses if religious groups offer them at their places of worship. In several cities, Christian groups, including Baptists, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics, operate private schools and can conduct religious instruction. During the year, some Christian private schools implemented a unified religious curriculum, which included grade-differentiated instruction on Biblical history and Christian theology. The CCL introduced the curriculum and the Ministry of Education approved it. Christian leaders were generally positive about the curriculum, although they anticipate making some amendments for next year’s curriculum revision. A Catholic leader called the curriculum “very good” while noting it would likely be refined after the first year of implementation. Catholic schools will supplement the universal information with additional material on the papacy and other topics specific to the Catholic faith. A leader of an unrecognized Christian denomination said the curriculum was not inclusive of diverse doctrinal perspectives. Private schools, both nonreligious and religious, 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 is optional for non-Muslims. The Islamic religion is an optional subject for secondary education certificate 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 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 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.

According to the constitution, matters of the personal status of non-Muslims whose religion the government officially recognizes are under the jurisdiction of denomination-specific courts of religious communities, except for matters of inheritance, when sharia is applied to all persons regardless of religious affiliation. Such ecclesiastical 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 religious groups lacking their own courts may 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 unrecognized religious groups. Such individuals must request a civil court to hear their case.

The OSJ appoints sharia judges, while each recognized non-Islamic religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. The OSJ maintains oversight of judicial performances of the sharia judges to ensure proper application of the provisions of the law. The law stipulates the cabinet must ratify the procedures of each non-Islamic religious (ecclesiastical) court. All judicial nominations must be approved by a royal decree.

According to the constitution, sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction with respect to cases concerning *diya* (monetary compensation to the families of homicide and injury victims', sometimes known as "blood money") in which both parties are Muslim 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 regarding matters pertaining to Islamic religious endowments. Muslims are also subject to the jurisdiction of sharia courts on civil matters that civil status legislation does not specifically address.

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.

The Personal Status Law (PSL), in accordance with its interpretation of sharia, forbids marriages between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man; 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 to Islam for their marriage to remain legal. If a Christian man converts to Islam while married to a Christian woman, his wife does not need to convert to Islam for the marriage to remain legal. There is no legal provision for civil marriage or divorce for members of unrecognized religious groups.

Sharia governs all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. The PSL stipulates that regardless of religious background, mothers may retain custody of their children until age 18. 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. Like citizenship, religion is transmitted only via the father. Female children of a Muslim father who converts to Christianity remain registered as Muslims and thus are ineligible to marry a non-Muslim.

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 the PSL, which mostly follows Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance if no equivalent inheritance guidelines are codified in their religion or if the state does not recognize their religion. In practice, Christian ecclesiastical courts use sharia-based rules to adjudicate inheritance. The country's 11 recognized denominations agreed on a draft law in May that would make the ecclesiastical courts' distribution of inheritance equal between male and female heirs. That draft law is awaiting government ratification.

National identification cards issued since 2016 do not list religion, but religious affiliation is still published on birth certificates, contained in records embedded in the identification card's electronic chip, and remains on file in other government records. National identification cards are renewed every 10 years. Passports do not list religion. Per the ban on conversion from Islam under sharia, converts from Islam are not allowed to change their religion on electronic records. Converts to Islam must 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 2022 amended electoral law, Christians are allocated nine of 138 parliamentary seats. Christians may not run for office in electorates not designated as Christian seats. No seats are reserved for adherents of other minority religious groups. The law stipulates that Muslims must hold all parliamentary seats not specifically reserved for Christians. The government classifies Druze as Muslims and permits them to hold office as Muslims.

Although the constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, labor law does not explicitly prohibit it.

The National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), a quasi-independent institution established by law, receives both government and international funding. The Prime Minister nominates its board of

trustees, and the King ratifies their appointment by royal decree. The board appointed in 2023 includes members of conservative political movements, former cabinet ministers, former judges, members of parliament, religious leaders, and civil society representatives.

The law prohibits parties formed on the basis of religion or sect, as well as membership in unlicensed parties.

In 2020, the Court of Cassation, the country's highest court, dissolved the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's (JMB) legal identity, saying the organization had failed to resolve its legal status. Authorities shut down the Brotherhood's headquarters and several offices in 2016 and transferred ownership of the property to a government-authorized offshoot, which said it had severed ties with the broader movement. The Ministry of Social Development's committee in charge of the JMB's legal dissolution announced that the Court of Cassation's final decision declaring the JMB's dissolution had been implemented and directed any creditors to address financial or legal claims on the JMB to the ministry.

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

Government Practices

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported instances of harassment by security officials, in-person and electronic surveillance, and bureaucratic delays or rejections of document requests, including passport applications. Others reported security force members pressured converts to denounce their conversions.

Christian converts belonging to unregistered denominations described personal accounts of security forces summoning them for questioning on several consecutive days, putting their jobs at risk. Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported they continued to worship in secret to avoid scrutiny by security officials. Because of the sharia ban on conversion, government officials generally refused to change the religion listed on official documents from Islam to any other religion. Accordingly, these converts' religious practice did not match their official religion, exposing them to claims of apostasy and personal status issues involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Members of non-Islamic religious groups unable to obtain religious divorces converted to Christian denominations allowing divorce or to Islam to divorce legally, according to reports from religious leaders and the Ministry of Justice. The chief of the OSJ continued 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 continued to enforce the interview requirement for converts to Islam, introduced in 2017, to determine whether their conversion reflected a genuine religious belief.

According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Freedom House, converts from Islam faced de facto "harassment" and "bureaucratic obstacles," despite no penal or criminal provisions for conversion. Converts to Christianity from Islam reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their "true" religious beliefs and practices.

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

During the year, the government Media Commission, which oversees licensing for newspapers, magazines, websites, radio, and television organizations in the country and monitors content, banned the distribution of 52 books including seven for religious reasons and 41 for ethical reasons,

including sexual content or promotion of violence and extremism. The Media Commission also reviewed 202 films and banned one for moral reasons. The Media Commission stated it conducts reviews of books and films in consultation with Christian and Muslim religious authorities.

Some religious leaders believe that the cybercrimes law enacted in September with provisions stipulating penalties for spreading “disinformation” and “defamation” online would have the effect of reducing hate speech targeting religious groups in Jordan.

The Ministry of Awqaf continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary not approved by the government. Authorities continued to disseminate themes and required imams to choose from a list of recommended texts for sermons. Imams violating these rules risked the authorities fining or banning them from preaching.

As of 2022, 7,600 mosques in Jordan were registered with the Ministry of Awqaf. Local media reported that number would increase by up to 100 annually. Over 2,700 imams are authorized to deliver sermons. Unofficial mosques continued to operate outside Ministry of Awqaf control in some cities, and imams outside of government employment preached without ministry supervision. Ministry of Awqaf inspections uncovered a very small number of cases of 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. Friday prayers in major cities were consolidated into central mosques, over which the Ministry of Awqaf had more oversight, continuing a process that began in 2018. The ministry allowed smaller mosques to continue Friday sermons along with their areas’ central mosque.

The MOA conducted monthly training for imams, preachers, and clerics, through courses, workshops, lectures, and preaching fora to expand their knowledge of jurisprudence. All MOA personnel attended these workshops, which were seen as a precursor to future courses related to jurisprudence, its origins, interpretation, and hadith sciences (the scholarly discipline dedicated to the evaluation of the recorded words and actions of the Prophet Muhammed), that the Ministry plans to offer.

Evangelical church leaders continued to report facing administrative obstacles because their churches were not a part of the CCL, and some government officials limited their ability to obtain licenses for certain activities. They asserted some of the pressure arose from a difficult relationship with the CCL, and that some leaders within the CCL viewed evangelicals negatively and associated their churches with proselytism and U.S.-based evangelical denominations that support Israel. A leader within an unrecognized church alleged the Orthodox church wielded an inordinate amount of power. Some leaders and members of evangelical churches faced questioning by security services.

Authorities issued a license to an unrecognized Christian church to operate a publishing house and private religious school in the governorate of Zarqa. The authorities granted the license after a prolonged period in which authorities denied the church a license.

Expatriate religious volunteers from the evangelical Christian community continued to face bureaucratic delays in renewing residency permits. The government enforced a residency policy that limited the ability of churches to sponsor religious volunteers for residency. Members of CCL-recognized churches suggested that volunteers were illegally proselytizing Muslims. Volunteers were required to obtain additional approvals, including from the Ministry of Labor, lengthening the average renewal process by several months, according to church officials.

As of year’s end, construction was ongoing on the first Chaldean Catholic Church in the country. The church was established in 2022 and would provide a formal place of worship for the country’s Chaldean community, primarily composed of the Iraqi refugee community, which experts estimated to total around 20,000. The church has not yet been granted official recognition by the CCL or the government.

The government continued its policy of not recognizing the Baha'i Faith but allowed Baha'is to practice their religion and included them in officially sponsored interfaith events. Sharia courts and the courts of other recognized religions continued not to issue 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 when the marriage was erroneously registered as Muslim. In those cases, the children were considered illegitimate and were not issued birth certificates or included in family books and subsequently were unable to obtain citizenship or register for school. Baha'i parents could generally designate a dash in lieu of assigning Islam or the Christian religion on their children's birth certificates. There were cases of daughters of Baha'i converts unable to marry Baha'i men because the birth certificates and official documents of the women maintained their religious designation as Islam, the prior faith of their fathers. Some members of the Baha'i Faith reported erroneous religious designations on birth certificates and official documents persisted for third-generation Baha'is.

Baha'is were able to obtain some documents such as marriage certificates through the civil courts, although they reportedly were required to pay fees that sometimes amounted to more than 500 dinars (\$710) for documents normally available for five dinars (\$7) through religious courts. Some Baha'is traveled to other countries to obtain officially recognized marriages and others sought marriages from sympathetic Muslim clergy, a process that Baha'is deemed unsustainable and unacceptable. Members of the Baha'i community stated that they continued to lobby the government unsuccessfully for recognition of Baha'is or at least for marriages, which are a requirement for their civil rights including transmitting citizenship to non-Jordanian spouses. Members of the Baha'i community had lobbied to gain a liaison position within the Ministry of Interior (a mechanism in place in some other Muslim-majority countries) but had not received an official response.

Three recognized cemeteries remained registered in the name of the Baha'i Faith through a special arrangement 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 that created a large financial burden. Baha'i leaders stated concerns that registering properties under individual Baha'is also exposed the individuals to personal legal and financial liabilities. Baha'i leaders said they were using the civil courts to challenge their group's property registration restrictions, stating they were unable to legally protect Baha'i assets if individuals who registered Baha'i property under their names decided to misappropriate funds or property. The Baha'i community's request for religious exemptions for property registration fees remained pending.

The government continued to deny official recognition to other religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses. Some unrecognized religious groups reported they continued to operate schools and hospitals and were able to hold services and meetings if they maintained a low profile. Some Christian denominations said that although all religious groups were equal in the eyes of the constitution, the government practiced favoritism toward specific Christian groups that had more political power, which increased tensions among these religious groups.

The government authorized Christian civil servants leave for Sunday worship and religious holidays, including Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Easter Sunday. Christians working for private sector employers were often granted leave for religious observation.

The CCL asked Christian communities in Jordan to cancel public festivities during the Christmas season, including bazaars, decorating initiatives, and musical celebrations, considering the conflict in Gaza. A Catholic leader told local media "We will focus only on the religious celebration, including worship services and songs inside the churches and nothing outside the churches."

The national school curriculum, including materials on tolerance, did not mention the Holocaust, but some private schools included it in their curricula.

Christian leaders said that due to the national secondary school curriculum's failure to teach the country's pre-Islamic history, many Jordanians believed Christianity arrived in the country during the Crusades. Human rights advocates and some religious leaders have reported shortfalls in the country's education system, including a lack of instruction on topics such as human rights, civics, and religious pluralism, contributing to a lack of Muslim awareness of the Christian faith, interdenominational rivalry between Christians, the nonrecognition of evangelicals and Baha'is, and reduced rights of agnostics, atheists, and Shia community. Some observers believed education leaders did not update curricula to address these shortfalls because of anticipated public backlash against such changes.

Members of non-Muslim religious groups, especially unregistered groups, continued to report occasional threats by the government to arrest them for disrupting public order if they proselytized Muslims.

Christian groups that maintained a lower profile noted examples of security forces monitoring them only when other Christian denominations submitted official complaints against them. In one case, a Christian group leader alleged that authorities demanded he cease religious activities occurring within privately-owned buildings in Salt and Zarqa, and that pastors in these buildings were coerced to sign pledges to close these establishments permanently. The group leader speculated that authorities had acted in response to official complaints filed by other Christian denominations.

During annual Islamic holidays, the Minister of Awqaf attended competitions and ceremonies for memorization and recitation of the Quran, including the annual Hashemite National and International Competition for memorizing and reciting the Quran, for male participants under the patronage of King Abdullah and female participants under the patronage of Queen Rania. The Minister of Awqaf also attended graduation ceremonies, and the MOA introduced Mosque Care Week at the beginning of the month of Ramadan.

The MOA operated approximately 3,000 summer centers for male and female Muslim students to study and memorize the Quran and participate in extracurricular activities in various regions of the country, free of charge. Approximately 170,000 students of varying age groups participated under the supervision of local imams and preachers.

The 2022 Child's Rights Law provides for the basic rights of each child, but does not explicitly address religious instruction. Judicial officials said the law complemented efforts by the Sharia Prosecution in child protection cases, including in the adjudication of decisions on personal status, custody, and inheritance over which Sharia courts continued to have some jurisdiction. Some religious and social conservatives have voiced objections to the legislation, citing a social media campaign promulgating allegations that the law would promote Western values, encourage children to rebel against their parents, engage in premarital sexual relationships, and change their religion.

The MOA continued to impose restrictions on centers for Quranic teachings. The MOA's restrictions imposed reduced working hours for the centers and established improved working conditions for managers and teachers. Prospective teachers were required to pass MOA examinations. Some activists said compliance with some of the introduced conditions was not possible because many of the centers' workers were volunteers.

In 2022, the government began work on a planned multimillion dollar, multi-phased project to develop the site that some scholars have identified as the location of the baptism of Jesus. The project's goal is to attract Christian tourists and investment and is expected to culminate by 2030. The parliament passed legislation in 2021 establishing a nonprofit foundation to oversee and coordinate the project. At year's end, local media reported over 200,000 visitors had visited the site in 2023, a record number.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Members of religious minorities served as deputy prime ministers, senators, members of parliament (MPs), and ambassadors. After a reorganization in October, the cabinet included one Druze member and one Christian member, maintaining the status quo from the previous cabinet. In recent years, a Christian MP served as House second deputy speaker for parliament's 2020-21 and 2021-22 terms.

The government continued to record Druze as Muslims on civil documents identifying the bearer's religious affiliation, without public objection from the Druze. Druze continued to report discrimination, and the geographic distribution of their constituencies hindered their coreligionists from reaching high positions in government civil service and official departments. The government did not include members of the Druze community in the Political Modernization Committee, which the King established in 2021 to reform the political system.

The government deemed some children, including children of unmarried women or interfaith marriages involving a Muslim woman and converts from Islam to another religion, "illegitimate" and denied them standard registration. The government issued these children, as well as orphans, special national identification numbers, which made it difficult for these children to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation.

Throughout the year, RIIFS, established under the patronage of Prince Hassan bin Talal, continued to organize and host periodic discussions and sponsored initiatives with religious leaders and social activists to promote political pluralism, cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and civic responsibility in the country and throughout the region. It also held comparative religion seminars on Muslim and Christian doctrinal teachings. Annually, RIIFS organizes the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, a forum for youth-led exchanges to encourage tolerance; the Arabic Publications Program; the Foreign Languages Publications Program; Visiting Scholars Program; Internship Program; and Peace and Arts Program. RIIFS issued several periodical publications, including four new volumes of Annashra (a bulletin covering interfaith issues and Arabic media coverage of religious topics), a new volume of the Bulletin of RIIFS (a biennial publication on religious issues in Jordan), a new volume of Maqabast Hadariyya (a publication promoting philosophical exchanges), and other case studies. RIIFS also hosted interfaith dialogues and an academic seminar on Islam during the year.

Throughout the year, King Abdullah publicly met with several leaders from various Christian denominations. During these engagements, the King emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue and harmony, as well as promoting Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem's holy sites. In December, Jordanian media reported that upon King Abdullah's directive, the Jordan Armed Forces airdropped humanitarian aid and food supplies into Gaza, with a specific allocation for Christians within the Church of Saint Porphyrius. Media reports also noted King Abdullah met with Christian leaders in Jordan to affirm Jordan's commitment to assisting those who had sought refuge in the church.

Other Developments Affecting Religious Freedom

In June, local media reported the General Intelligence Directorate had prevented a terrorist attack at a Shi'i Muslim shrine in Karak plotted by an ISIS sympathizer. The man allegedly planned to target Shi'i pilgrims with an assault rifle. Initially, media reported the State Security Court sentenced him to five years of labor. The sentence was later reduced to four years.

In March, the MOA hosted the 43rd International Scientific Conference at the King Abdullah II Institute for the Rehabilitation of Imams and Preachers, highlighting the 2004 Amman Message, a landmark statement forming the basis for additional Muslim scholarship calling for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world, and aiming to combat misconceptions about Islam and highlighting

Islam's rejection of incitement. Seventy scholars and religious leaders from 24 countries attended the event.

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. Many reported they worshipped in secret because of the social stigma they faced as converts, while others reported persistent threats of violence from family members protecting a traditional understanding of honor. According to international NGOs, female converts from Islam were particularly vulnerable to harassment and pressure to renounce their conversions. Church leaders continued to report incidents of violence, pressure, and discrimination against religious converts and persons in interfaith romantic relationships; the latter continued to report ostracism and, in some cases, feuds among family members and violence toward those involved. Atheists and some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Converts from Christianity to Islam also reported social stigma from their families and Christian society. Christian women married to Muslim men were more often stigmatized. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination. Although an individual's religion was no longer written on identification cards, one's religion could often be surmised based on personal and family names. There were some reports of Christian women facing harassment for not wearing head coverings.

Religious leaders reported continuing online hate speech, frequently through social media, directed towards religious minorities and those who advocated religious moderation. Some NGOs turned off comments on websites and blocked repeat offenders on their social media accounts in an effort to avoid hate speech. There were numerous initiatives to combat hate speech, most of them led and driven by civil society organizations through funding from international donors.

In private, religious leaders and academics connected hate speech, intolerance, and extremism with poverty and a lack of educational opportunities in the country.

Criticism in digital media, including social media, continued to target non-Muslim religions. Religious minorities expressed concerns that some Muslim leaders preached intolerance. Some observers said criticism of religious minorities online increased in 2023, particularly as conflict between Israel and Hamas escalated, due to a perceived association between Christianity and the United States. In November, an arsonist set fire to a church and its affiliated school in Zarqa. In December, a Christian leader in Madaba said a group of youths had thrown stones at his church. During the Christmas season, some Christians felt uncomfortable with the heavy security presence around churches. The government provided this security as additional protection for congregations, but some said it detracted from their worship. Christians reported they self-segregated into Christian enclaves in Amman and its outskirts to escape social pressure and threats. Although Christians clustered in specific neighborhoods and sought to emigrate abroad for safety and community support, Christian leaders stated it was difficult to categorize the desire to relocate as solely based on religious identity, saying Christians relocated to the cities and moved abroad seeking economic opportunities as well.

Observers continued to report friction between Christian denominations on the CCL and evangelical churches not recognized by the government, though some observers posited that interpersonal conflict drove this friction and that relations between denominations were generally positive. Leaders from some CCL-affiliated churches claimed that evangelical churches maintained "recruitment efforts" and "hidden agendas" against their members and Jordanian society writ large, and that evangelical churches were disrupting interfaith harmony, creating rifts in local society, and undermining the CCL's relationship with the government and security services. CCL leaders stated they worried that outsiders "causing trouble" would bring unwanted attention on the Christian

community. Members of the evangelical community continued to say some CCL leaders applied pressure on the government to not recognize evangelical churches in the country. Evangelical religious entities operated approximately 57 churches across the country in addition to many social and educational institutions, according to a senior evangelical leader.

During the year, a number of atheists reported physical abuse by family members for rejecting their family's religious beliefs. When the victims reported the incidents to the police, officers allegedly dismissed them, calling the issue a "family matter" and adding that the authorities were unable to intervene in these cases. The individuals continued to live in fear and risked further physical and psychological abuses.

In September, local media reported a Roman Catholic church in the Balqa governorate had been vandalized for the second time in 2023. The vandals demolished a portion of the church's outer wall, but since they remained unidentified, their motivations were not clear.

Antisemitic hate speech on social media proliferated significantly following heightened conflict between Israel and Hamas in the aftermath of the October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel. Widespread antisemitic hate speech reportedly appeared on social media, in public and private schools, and among protesters at demonstrations across the country. According to Reuters, protesters chanted antisemitic slogans and called for the permanent closure of the Israeli embassy in Amman. The Anti-Defamation League released a report in December on antisemitic political cartoons from Arab media that featured 10 cartoons published in Jordanian outlets. Government officials publicly condemned acts of both Islamophobia and antisemitism. In November, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi decried instances of Islamophobia and antisemitism, saying such occurrences were "something that we all stand against unequivocally on principle and in accordance with human values." He added that "Muslim, Christian, Jewish, all other human values dictate... we do not allow for the very dangerous dehumanization we see." In a November interview with CNN, Jordan's Queen Rania said, "I want to absolutely and wholeheartedly condemn antisemitism and Islamophobia."

Several Jewish travelers reported that border authorities engaged in discriminatory practices, such as confiscating religious items at ports of entry. In April, a Haredi Jewish Israeli traveler reported he was denied entry into Jordan at the border crossing with Israel when he refused to cut or conceal his sidelocks. In July, a group of Orthodox Israeli Jews alleged that Jordanian officials detained them at the border crossing, telling them it was not safe to display characteristics that identified them as Jewish, such as wearing tzitzit, a kippah, or payot in the country. A border official stated that the country admits travelers from Israel in accordance with the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty and Jordanian law. In reference to instances of mistreatment of Jewish visitors at the border, officials have said that when it imposes restrictions, it does so "to preserve the safety of visitors while in Jordan."

In May, a Palestinian journalist wrote an article in the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Dustour* in which he described "Zionist Jews" as "the descendants of apes and pigs."

The Catholic Center for Studies and Media (CCSM) and the American University in Madaba continued to host dozens of students from various Jordanian universities for a workshop on using social media to promote interfaith harmony. The training focused on promoting dialogue to counter religiously based hate speech and promote respect and human dignity. The CCSM hosted a seminar in February on the role of media in promoting "human fraternity." In June, it hosted a conference on the religious perspective on political participation.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement ✓

The Ambassador and U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including with the Minister of Awqaf, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and senior officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to advocate for the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith tolerance.

During Ramadan, the deputy chief of mission hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing together several religious officials, educators, and leaders to discuss the country's interfaith legacy and how to continue promoting respect and harmony with faith communities.

Embassy officers continued to meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, including unrecognized groups, religious converts, expatriate religious volunteers, and interfaith institutions such as RIIFS and the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, to discuss issues related to religious freedom.

The embassy used social media to promote religious tolerance and mark religious holidays, including through posting video messages, which received generally positive responses from social media audiences.