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Morocco

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The report for [Western Sahara](#) is appended at the end of this report.

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the faithful and the Supreme Representative of the Muslim community." Non-Muslim foreign communities openly practice their faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing. Several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places some restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities were deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, converts from Islam to Christianity may face difficulties.

The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of approximately 172,320 square miles. According to the 2004 census, the population was 33 million, and more than 99 percent of the citizens are Sunni Muslims.

According to Moroccan Jewish community leaders, there are approximately 4,000 Jews, the majority of whom reside in Casablanca and are the remnants of a much larger community that has emigrated. The estimated size of the Rabat Jewish community is 200 to 250. The remainder of the Jewish population is dispersed throughout the country.

The expatriate Christian community, Catholic and Protestant, consists of approximately 5,000 practicing members, although some estimates are as high as 25,000. Most Christians reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas.

The Baha'i community, also located in urban areas, numbers 350 to 400 persons. The Government recognizes the presence of a Shi'a Muslim community; however, the size is unknown.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the faithful and the Supreme Representative of the Muslim community" with the responsibility of ensuring "respect for Islam." The Government prohibits the distribution of Christian religious materials, bans all proselytizing, and tolerates several small religious minorities with varying degrees of restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature. Jewish and foreign Christian communities openly practice their faiths. A small foreign Hindu community may freely perform cremations and hold services. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of restrictions on the religious activities of the Baha'is or Shi'a Muslims.

No official process exists for registering new religious groups. Registration allows the groups to make financial transactions and undertake other business as private associations and legal entities. Registered churches and associations include the Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, English Protestant, and Anglican Churches. During the reporting period, the Government did not license or approve new religions or religious

organizations.

The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of the major religious groups, namely Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The Government's annual education budget funds the teaching of Islam in public schools and religious instruction in separate Jewish public schools. The Government also funded the study of Jewish culture and its artistic, literary, and scientific heritage. At the University of Rabat, two professors teach Hebrew and one teaches comparative religion in the Department of Islamic Studies. Throughout the country, approximately 12 other professors teach Hebrew. The country is the only Arab nation with a Jewish museum.

The Government continued to encourage tolerance, respect, and dialogue among the religious groups. During the reporting period, senior government officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, received delegations of U.S. Christian and Jewish leaders.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments continued a graduate level theological course, part of which focuses on Christianity and Judaism, and another that trains both men and women to be counselors and teachers in mosques.

The Government organizes the annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which includes musicians from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual traditions. The 13th anniversary of the festival was held June 1-10, 2007. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the King hosted colloquia of Muslim religious scholars that, among other issues, considered ways to encourage tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religions. For the fourth consecutive year, a woman spoke during Ramadan in the presence of the King and religious scholars. A woman is also a member of the Supreme Council of Ulemas, or religious scholars.

The following Islamic holy days are national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr. Other religious groups observe their holy days without interference from government authorities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments monitors or provides guidance on Friday mosque sermons and the Qur'anic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of Islamists but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly close mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controls authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques are constructed using private funds.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments controls and monitors the activities of mosques, places restrictions on activities deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice or become political in nature, and provides religious training for imams. Authorities stated that these measures have eliminated the exploitation of mosques for political propaganda, such as distributing pamphlets and raising funds for illicit organizations.

The Government does not recognize the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which rejects the King's spiritual authority. The JCO holds to a conservative interpretation of Islam and advocates an Islamic state contrary to the Constitution. The JCO continued to organize and participate in demonstrations and operate two websites, although the Government did not allow the public distribution of JCO-published materials. The Government continued closing the JCO's weekly meetings and open houses throughout the reporting period. The Government arrested the Oujda city JCO leader on August 17, 2006. The courts fined the leader \$15,000 (150,000 dirhams), determined his house was illegally constructed, and threatened to demolish it. On March 29, 2007, the leader and three other JCO members were sentenced to one year in prison for participating in illegal gatherings. JCO sources reported that members were regularly harassed.

Government informers monitored campus activities, primarily those conducted by Islamists.

According to Article 220 of the Penal Code, any attempt to stop one or more persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs or from attendance at religious services is unlawful and may be punished by 3 to 6 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$10 to \$50 (115 to 575 dirhams). The article applies the same penalty to "anyone who employs incitements to shake the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion." Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. Foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work discreetly. The Government cites the Penal Code's prohibition on proselytism in most cases in which courts ruled to expel foreign missionaries. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes.

Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions may face social ostracism, and in the past a small number of converts faced short periods of questioning or detention by authorities for proselytizing and have been denied

issuance of passports. There were no reports of such occurrences during the reporting period.

On November 28, 2006, a foreign Christian was fined \$50 (500 dirhams) and given a 6-month prison sentence for attempting to convert a Muslim to Christianity. The prison sentence was suspended, and the individual left the country of his own accord.

A small foreign Christian community operates churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without government restrictions. Missionaries who refrain from proselytizing and conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations largely are left unhindered; however, those whose activities become public face expulsion.

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. It generally confiscates Arabic-language Bibles, however, and refuses licenses for their importation and sale despite the absence of any law banning such books.

There are two sets of laws and courts pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters--one for Muslims and another for Jews. The family law courts are administered, depending on the law that applies, by Muslim and rabbinical authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to these laws. The judges who preside over Islamic family law courts are trained in Shari'a (Islamic law) as applied in the country. From the 2004 institution of a new family law code until the end of 2006, the Ministry of Justice, often in cooperation with international nongovernmental organizations, trained 1,571 judges and 2,303 legal clerks and established 70 family law courts.

Rabbinical authorities administer family courts for Jews. Non-Qur'anic sections of Islamic law concerning personal and family status matters are applicable to all non-Muslim citizens. Christians inherit according to the civil law. Jews maintain their own separate inheritance law based on Jewish religious law.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, converts from Islam to Christianity may face difficulties.

Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals. Many citizens of all religions believe that the country is enriched by its centuries-old Jewish minority, and Jews lived in safety throughout the country during the reporting period. On request the Government provides special protection to community members, visitors, and institutions. Annual Jewish commemorations took place around the country, and Jewish pilgrims regularly visited holy sites. Muslim citizens study at Christian and Jewish schools. A Jewish school in Casablanca has a majority of Muslim students, and a hospital run by the Jewish community provides care to low-income citizens regardless of religion.

Although the free expression of the Islamic faith and free academic and theological discussion of non-Islamic religions are accepted on television and radio, society discourages all public efforts to proselytize. Because many Muslims view the Baha'i Faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam, and consequently, Baha'is as apostates, most members of the Baha'i community avoid disclosing their religious affiliation; however, Baha'is' concerns for their personal safety and property does not prevent their functioning in society, and some hold government jobs.

There is widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. However, some dissenters challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam. The Government views these dissenters as a political rather than a religious challenge, as these critiques relate largely to the exercise of power.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of any religious group.

U.S. government officials met regularly with religious officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, Islamic religious scholars, leaders of the Jewish community, Christian missionaries, the leaders of the registered Christian communities, and other local Christians during the period covered by this report. U.S. programs

focusing on religious tolerance and freedom using the U.S. model took place.

U.S. government officials met regularly with members of religious communities to promote tolerance and freedom. Officials actively promoted and facilitated meetings between the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments and visiting U.S. religious leaders.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Constitution of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government of Morocco through the U.S. Mission and the Department of State in Washington as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The territory has an area of 102,706 square miles and a population of 273,000. The majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, or the veneration of religious figures and their assumed tombs. A very small Catholic minority appears to function openly and without significant problems.

There is a small foreign community working for the U.N. peacekeeping contingent, known by its French initials, MINURSO (the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara); most of its members are not Muslims.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the territory are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90217.htm)