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Jordan

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. The state religion is Islam. The Government prohibits conversion from Islam and efforts to proselytize Muslims.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined during the period covered by this report. The Government's handling of apostasy cases, expulsion of approximately thirty foreign Christian religious workers, and instances of individual and organizational harassment based on religious affiliation all contributed to the decline. Members of unrecognized religious groups and converts from Islam face legal discrimination and risk the loss of civil rights, including threats to their person and/or family. Shari'a courts have the authority to prosecute proselytizers and converts from Islam.

Relations between Muslims and Christians generally were good, and prominent societal leaders and members of the royal family took steps to promote religious freedom. Adherents of unrecognized religions, Muslims who convert to other religious groups, and those seen to be proselytizing Muslims, however, face societal discrimination and the threat of mental and physical abuse. Following dissemination of a declaration by the country's Council of Church Leaders that disparaged the country's evangelicals and accused them of inciting sectarian strife, many articles critical of evangelicals appeared in the press, contributing to an acrimonious media and public opinion climate. According to a convert to Christianity from Islam convicted of apostasy, his relatives severely beat him and his father formally charged him with apostasy. Official hospital records indicate that the convert sustained multiple injuries.

The Ambassador, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, senior administration officials, and members of Congress raised U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials. In addition, the Embassy supported a number of exchange and outreach programs that facilitate religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 55,436 square miles and a population of 6.5 million. More than 92 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official government figures estimate that Christians make up 5 percent of the population; however, Christian leaders privately estimate the figure to be closer to 3 percent. According to representatives of the respective communities and newspaper reports, there are a small number of Shi'a Muslims, approximately 1,000 Baha'is, and approximately 14,000 Druze. There are an estimated 150,000 Christians, including about 12,000 evangelicals. There are no statistics available regarding the number of persons who are not adherents of any religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches. Unrecognized Christian denominations include Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Other Christian churches include the Baptist Church, Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, the Assemblies of God, and Christian and Missionary Alliance. There are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi'a among the Iraqi refugee population.

There are an estimated 250,000 to 450,000 Iraqis in the country, many of whom are undocumented or on visitor permits. Of those registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 48 percent are Sunni Muslim, 28 percent Shi'a Muslim, and 15 percent Christian.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of religious minorities. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, also have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a sizeable Druze community, as does Umm al-Jamal in the governorate of Mafrq. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarka and a smaller number in Irbid and Aqaba. There are a number of nonindigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and the south. The Druze are registered as "Muslims" and, as they have their own court in al-Azraq, can administer their own personal status matters.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, in Article 14, provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. The Constitution, in Article 16, stipulates that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion. According to the Constitution, the state religion is Islam and the King must be Muslim.

The Constitution, in Articles 103-106, also provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are under the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts which apply Shari'a in their proceedings. Personal status includes religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied in cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-Muslims whose religion is recognized by the Government are under the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, according to Article 108.

Because Shari'a governs the personal status of Muslims, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and efforts to proselytize Muslims. However, neither the Constitution nor the law explicitly prohibits proselytizing. Muslims who convert to another religion face societal and governmental discrimination. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and may be denied their civil and property rights. The Government does not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status; converts are still considered Muslims. Converts to Islam fall under the jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. Shari'a, in theory, provides for the death penalty for Muslims who apostatize; however, the Government has never applied such punishment. The Government freely allows conversion to Islam.

Shari'a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father, and all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered to be Muslim. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam.

In cases in which a Muslim converts to Christianity, the authorities do not recognize the conversion as legal, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law. In cases decided by a Shari'a court, the judges have annulled the convert's marriage, transferred child custody and property rights to Muslim family members, deprived him of civil rights, and declared him a ward of the state and without any religious identity.

In June 2006 the Government published the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in the Official Gazette. According to Article 93.2 of the Constitution, acts published in the Official Gazette possess the force of law. Article 18 of the Covenant states that everyone shall have the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching." Additionally, the Covenant stipulates that no one shall be subject to coercion that would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. The country ratified the ICCPR without reservations in 1976. However, Article 2, Section 2 of the ICCPR states that the Covenant is not self-executing and requires implementing legislation to give the Covenant effect. By the end of the reporting period, no such legislation had been proposed. Nevertheless, a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the ICCPR's publication in the Official Gazette signifies that the Government considers the Covenant as a source of law alongside domestic law, including the Constitution and Shari'a. Articles 103-106 of the Constitution still provide that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims, including religion, are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts which apply Shari'a (Hanafi) in their proceedings.

The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as "societies" come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Baha'i Faith. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. Members of religious groups who have no legally recognized court system sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to Islam in order to divorce legally.

While Christianity is a recognized religion and Christians, both local and foreign, may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and administer sacraments, including marriage. Churches and other religious institutions can receive official recognition by applying to the Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister confers with the Council of Church Leaders in Jordan, an unofficial body comprised of the Bishops of the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox Churches, on matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration and recommendation of new churches. The Government refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of

Christian churches: the faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; it must be recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizen adherents. Groups that the Government deems to engage in practices that violate the law and the nature of society or threaten the stability of public order are prohibited. There were no reports of banned religious groups.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts (Awqaf) manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that preachers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. However, the Government revoked the tax-exempt status of the Jordanian Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS) in November 2006. The Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assemblies of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Interior as "societies" but not as churches. The Baptist Church is registered as a "denomination."

The Government does not recognize the Druze religion and the Baha'i Faith, but does not prohibit their practice. The Druze did not complain of official or societal discrimination. On national identity cards, or "family books," which normally identify the bearer's religious community, the Government records Druze as Muslims. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq, and four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies."

Baha'is face similar official discrimination. On national identity cards, the Government records Baha'is as Muslims, leaves the space blank, or marks it with dashes. The Baha'i community does not have its own court to adjudicate personal status matters, such as inheritance and other family-related issues; such cases may be heard in Shari'a courts. Baha'is have an "assembly" that officiates marriages; however, the Department of Civil Status and Passports (DCSP) does not recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, although they do issue passports on the basis of these marriages, but without entering the marriage into official records. The DCSP will not issue birth certificates for the children of these marriages or residence permits for partners who are not citizens. The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship. There are two recognized Baha'i cemeteries, but the cemetery in Adasieh is registered in the name of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, despite requests to register it under the Baha'i Faith.

Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for purposes of official identification.

Employment applications for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion. Christians serve regularly as cabinet ministers. Of the 110 seats of the lower house of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians. In November 2007 King Abdullah appointed four Christians to serve in the Upper House. No seats are reserved for adherents of other religious groups. Although no seats are reserved for Druze, they are permitted to hold office under their government classification as Muslims.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians (4 percent); however, all senior command positions are held by Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer on certain occasions. According to the Foreign Ministry, Christians are dispersed throughout the armed forces. There are only Sunni Muslim chaplains in the armed forces; however, Christians and Shi'a Muslims are not prohibited from practicing their religion.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses or the Church of Christ, but each is allowed to conduct religious services without interference.

The Government recognizes Judaism as a religion; however, there are reportedly no citizens who are Jewish. The Government does not impose restrictions on Jews, and they are permitted to own property and conduct business in the country.

Public schools provide mandatory religious instruction for all Muslim students. Christian students are not required to attend courses that teach Islam. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own communities "provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to government control in matters relating to their curriculums and orientation."

The Ministry of Tourism has oversight over preservation of holy sites and encourages tourism to the four main historic Christian and many Islamic religious sites in the Kingdom, including the Shi'a pilgrimage site near Karak. There were no reports of misuse or neglect of these sites, nor of harassment or discrimination in their use.

The Government observes Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, the

Islamic New Year, Christmas, Easter, and the Gregorian calendar New Year as national holidays. Christians are traditionally given leave on Christian holidays approved by the Council of Church Leaders in Jordan, such as Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. The partially government-owned *Jordan Times* newspaper published weekly contact information for both Orthodox and evangelical churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited, but some government actions appear to impede the activities of some Muslim and non-Muslim groups. The Government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal and official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have applied for or been accorded legal recognition.

On December 11, 2007, the Prime Ministry issued a circular to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Commissioner General, and the Mayor of Amman, informing them that advance Ministry of Interior approval must be received for the licensing of "places of worship," for both old and new premises. One Christian group complained that this measure puts more than 50 percent of its churches under scrutiny and at risk of closure. The Baptist Church applied for official registration with the Ministry of Interior on December 12, 2006. In June 2007 the Prime Ministry denied the Church's application. No additional information regarding the reason for denial was available by the end of the reporting period.

Iraqi Christian churches reported no restrictions on the practice of their faith. A group of Iraqi Sunni scholars requested the Government's permission to establish a religious institute and training center in May 2007. By the end of the reporting period, it had not received a reply.

In September 2007 the Center for Cultural and Educational Affairs for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints applied through the Ministry of Interior to purchase land to build a religious gathering facility and educational center in Amman. Authorization was allegedly denied for zoning reasons, although this could not be verified through any official documentation.

The JETS, a Christian training school for pastors and other Christian leaders, licensed by the Government in 1995, operates as an educational institution under the Ministry of Culture but was denied accreditation in 2004. Because JETS is not accredited, its students are not eligible for student visas but may enter the country on tourist visas of limited duration. The JETS program requires 4 years of study, and as a consequence many students overstay their visas; upon departure from the country they, and any family members who may have accompanied them, are required to pay \$2 (1.4 Dinars) for each day they spent without a visa (as are other visiting foreign nationals). Additionally, the Government does not allow JETS to accept Muslim students. In August 2007, 11 JETS students were denied re-entry on the grounds that they did not have the correct visa type. One thousand five-hundred reference books for the new library, purchased in Egypt, have reportedly been held at customs in Aqaba since January 2008 despite requests for their release.

The Political Parties Law, which took effect April 1, 2008, prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity.

On November 1, 2007, the Court of First Instance decided to suspend legal proceedings against Jihad al-Momani, former chief editor of the weekly newspaper *Shihan*, and Hashim al-Khalidi, of the weekly *Al Mihar*. This ruling followed the appeal of their May 2006 sentence to 2 months in prison, having been charged in February 2006 with "denigrating the Prophets in public" and "insulting God." They were initially arrested in January 2006 for printing controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, approximately thirty noncitizen members of evangelical churches, many of whom were long-time residents of the country, were either deported, refused renewal of residency, or denied re-entry after exiting the country. The Government cited concern for the evangelicals' personal safety, violation of immigration regulations, and actions while in the country that violated unspecified laws as the reasons for these decisions. Subsequently, the Government permitted three of the evangelicals to return, on the condition that they not proselytize Muslims.

On May 6, 2008, the court hearing of an apostasy case brought to the Amman Shari'a Court by the Muslim brother of a Baha'i convert in March 2007 was postponed until further notice. The 56-year-old defendant converted when he was 19. Advocates for the defendant claimed the brother filed the complaint in connection with issues of inheritance, as apostates under Shari'a law are denied rights to family inheritance. Neither the Baha'i, who claims that Shari'a courts do not have jurisdiction over apostasy, his brother, or their respective legal counsels attended any court proceedings.

On April 22, 2008, the Sweilih Shari'a Court found Muhammad Abbad Abbad, a convert from Islam to Christianity, guilty of apostasy, annulled his marriage, and declared him to be without any religious identity. On March 24, 2008,

Abbad, 40, who converted in 1993, was reportedly taken to Sweilih Shari'a Court without legal representation on charges of apostasy. During this session, Abbad was accused of "contempt of court" and sentenced to 1 week's imprisonment. On March 28, Abbad and his wife departed the country with their two children for fear of losing civil rights and child custody and having their marriage annulled. At a subsequent Shari'a Court hearing on March 30, the absence of Abbad and his wife prompted the judge to issue warrants for the couple's arrest. On April 22, Abbad's marriage was legally annulled by the Shari'a court.

In April 2008 an Egyptian allegedly had his passport confiscated because of links to a particular Christian organization and was deported 2 weeks later. In April 2007 a Western religious worker who belonged to the same organization and had resided in the country for more than 15 years was summoned and questioned by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) about Christian meetings at his place of work. He was reportedly warned against proselytizing and asked about his residency status before being released. In May 2007, on his return from a trip outside the country, he was allegedly detained at Queen Alia International Airport for 20 hours. During the same period a Muslim Egyptian national, resident for 20 years and working at the same organization, was summoned by the GID for questioning which allegedly included being asked whether he was distributing Christian literature.

In February 2008 the Government expelled an Egyptian pastor with the Assemblies of God and an Egyptian pastor with the Baptist church in Zarqa. In December 2007 authorities arrested and deported a Finnish pastor (resident for 6 years) and two Korean church workers. In November 2007 the Government refused residency renewals to two American pastors, both residents for more than 10 years. In September 2007 the Government denied residency renewal to an American pastor who had been resident in the country for 33 years. In addition, the authorities denied entry and residency to 11 JETS students (Iraqi, Syrian and Egyptian nationals). In August 2007 one American was denied residency renewal and deported.

The Nazarene Churches in Aqaba and the Jordan Valley were closed in February 2008 and November 2007, respectively, on grounds of zoning restrictions. The main Nazarene church in Swefieh, Amman, which is under the same leadership, was threatened with closure following the December 11, 2007, Prime Ministry circular requiring pre-approval from the Ministry of Interior for the licensing of "places of worship." Allegedly, security officers in civilian clothes questioned church-goers outside the Swefieh church on several occasions during the reporting period. The Government deported the church's Egyptian national assistant to Egypt on February 6, 2008, after the GID allegedly detained and questioned him for 10 days regarding activities of the church without pressing charges.

Following a Western media report criticizing the Government for religious freedom violations that included the expulsion of missionaries, the Council of Church Leaders in Jordan issued a declaration on February 4, 2008, which briefly appeared on the website of the country's Embassy in Washington, D.C. According to credible reports, the Government solicited the Council to issue a response to the media report. Parliament issued a statement endorsing the declaration on February 21. The February 4 statement by the Council, comprised of the Bishops of the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox Churches, accused the local evangelical Christians of being "illegitimate" Christians, fomenting sectarian strife with Muslims, and threatening public security. The February 4 declaration, which supported the government's decision to deport or deny residency permits to approximately 30 foreign evangelical Christians, was picked up by local daily newspapers on February 5 and for several weeks resulted in the publication of numerous articles and editorials in the local press critical of evangelical activities in the country. Foreign evangelical Christians were accused of conducting "illegal missionary work." Evangelical church leaders in the country attempted to publish their response to the letter but were allegedly denied permission by the dailies' editors-in-chiefs, although one response was found on the *Ammoun* news website.

On April 29, 2007, government authorities deported Pastor Mazhar Izzat Bishay of the Aqaba Free Evangelical Church, an Egyptian national and 28-year resident married to a Jordanian, to Egypt. It was reported that they had previously interrogated him and offered him no reason for his deportation.

In November 2006 authorities deported Wajeeh Besharah, Ibrahim Atta, Raja Welson, and Imad Waheeb, four Coptic Egyptians living in Aqaba, to Egypt. It was reported that the authorities questioned them about their affiliation with the Free Evangelical Church in Aqaba prior to their deportation.

On January 20, 2006, a Shari'a court received an apostasy complaint against Mahmoud Abdel Rahman Mohammad Eleker, a convert from Islam to Christianity. On April 14, 2006, the complainant, the convert's brother-in-law, dropped the charges after the convert's wife renounced in the presence of a lawyer any claims she might have to an inheritance from her own parents. At the end of the reporting period, there was no further update on the case.

In 2005 a Shari'a appeals court upheld the apostasy conviction of Samer al-Aidy, a convert from Islam to Christianity. The verdict declared him to be a ward of the state, stripped him of his civil rights, annulled his marriage, and declared him to be without religious identity. It stated that he lost all rights to inheritance and may not remarry his (now former) wife unless he returns to Islam. The convert left the country, received refugee status, and was resettled.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April 2008 a civil court issued a divorce certificate for the first time to a Baha'i couple.

In March 2008 Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC) hosted two American activists in the interfaith dialogue field to meet with local counterparts to discuss "Islam: Scholarship and Practice" for 3 days.

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, under the patronage of Prince El Hassan bin Talal, held a 2-day conference on "Religion and the Rule of Law in the Near East" in February 2008. Thirty-four academic and civil society institutions were represented from Jordan, Turkey, Germany, Sudan, Lebanon, France, Qatar, and Morocco.

In January 2008 the Jordan JICRC organized a 2-day conference on "Coexistence and Peacemaking" with representatives from the Catholic, evangelical, and Orthodox Churches, as well as Muslim organizations from around the Middle East. The Amman conference was held under the King's patronage, and was presided over by senior government officials as well as religious leaders and scholars. Approximately 250 persons attended. The conference produced a document, signed by the representatives, declaring unity in a mission toward peace and understanding.

In October 2007 the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought led efforts that resulted in the issuing, on October 13, 2007, of an open letter calling for interfaith dialogue to be based on love of God and neighbor. The document, "A Common Word Between Us and You," was issued by 138 Muslim leaders, clerics, and scholars, and addressed to Christians worldwide. The Institute collected signatures for the Common Word document representing all eight schools of Islamic thought. The document was finalized at a conference hosted by the Institute under the patronage of King Abdullah in September 2007, entitled "Love in the Qu'ran." The conference brought together representatives from 40 Arab Islamic and non-Islamic countries.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. Parents usually strongly discourage young adults from pursuing interfaith romantic relationships, because they may lead to conversion. Such relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple or feuds between members of the couple's families.

According to Muhammad Abbad, the abovementioned convert to Christianity from Islam convicted of apostasy, his relatives severely beat him. Official hospital records indicate he sustained multiple injuries. Abbad's father formally charged him with apostasy and filed for custody of his children. Abbad also reported that he was mocked and denied medical treatment by police during the processing of his case.

Following dissemination of the February, 4, 2008 Council of Church Leaders' statement on the Government's deportation of foreign missionaries that disparaged the country's evangelicals and accused them of inciting sectarian strife, many negative articles were published in the press about evangelical Christians, contributing to an acrimonious media and public opinion climate.

Anti-Semitic cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces appeared occasionally in mainstream media outlets and did not prompt a response from the Government.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government promotes religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials raised religious freedom and other human rights issues with government authorities on many occasions via formal inquiry and discussion. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities, as well as with private religious organizations.

The U.S. Department of State continued its multiphase exchange program to bring U.S. religious leaders to the country and to send imams and other national religious leaders to the United States for outreach activities involving grassroots communities and youth to promote tolerance and a more inclusive understanding of religious freedom as a fundamental human right and source of stability.

Between June 23 and August 4, 2008, an assistant professor of Western Philosophy at the University of Jordan and a part-time researcher at the office of Prince Hassan, which takes a special interest in interfaith dialogue, participated in a 6-week exchange program at the University of California Santa Barbara under a U.S.-funded project entitled "Religious Pluralism in the United States." The program of study included how U.S. society, culture, and institutions allow varied religious beliefs to coexist.

Between March 17 and April 4, 2008, the Director of the "Awqaf" Directorate in the southern city of Ma'an participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue." The Director also preaches in various mosques in the governorate of Ma'an, and manages centers for the teaching of the Qur'an. The program demonstrated how people of different religious faiths work together to improve their communities as well as the extent to which Islam has become a significant, albeit minority, religion in the United States.

The U.S. Embassy hosted two digital video conferences (DVCs) with prominent Muslim-Americans during the reporting year. On March 15, 2008, the U.S. Embassy hosted a DVC with the President of the Detroit chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee on the topic: "Peaceful Coexistence in America," which discussed how members of religious minority groups, such as Muslim-Americans, work with human rights and law enforcement organizations to counter extremist ideology and nurture tolerant expressions of faith. On May 12, 2008, the Embassy hosted a DVC with the Executive Director of the American Islamic Congress on the topic "How Are American Muslims Countering Extremism/Discrimination?" to discuss how members of many religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, find common ground in promoting freedom of conscience and religious expression. The guests for both events included Muslim and Christian leaders, Shari'a students, and judges, academics, and the media.

In January 2008, as part of a three-part exchange, U.S. Army Central Command sent six local chaplains to meet with a group of U.S. military chaplains to discuss their experiences and best practices as military chaplains.

In October 2007 the U.S. Government sponsored ten local graduate Shari'a students to participate in an IVLP program on "The Role of Religion." The project was designed to introduce the students to the freedom and tolerance enjoyed by all religious groups in the United States and the role of religion, faith, and spirituality in American society and politics, as well as to provide the participants with a setting in which discussion could lead to stimulating intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

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