

2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: France

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice religion. The law provides authorities with broad powers to monitor and dissolve religious organizations and groups they determine to be promoting ideas contrary to French values. The constitution includes the concept of secularism, and the law prohibits the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public spaces such as schools.

In April, the government reported that in the previous year, as part of a nationwide program to counter “Islamism and communitarianism,” the Interior Ministry conducted 3,000 assessments and had temporarily closed seven mosques and dissolved five Islamist associations. Following antisemitic statements by a party official in August, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin ordered the dissolution of Civitas, described by multiple sources as a far-right party comprising mostly ultra-traditional Catholics. In March, Jehovah’s Witnesses filed an administrative appeal of a government report, stating it made “unsubstantiated and defamatory claims” against the religious group and devoted an excessive amount of attention to the group even though it accounted for only a small number of public complaints. The country’s highest court in June upheld a ban by the national soccer federation on women soccer players wearing the hijab during play, and in September, the government issued a decision prohibiting French athletes from wearing the hijab at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The country’s highest administrative court in September upheld a government ban on wearing the abaya in public schools, stating it was in conformity with a law banning the display of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools. The judges ruled the ban did not violate fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion. According to an August government memorandum, there were 4,710 infringements of the secularism law in schools during the 2022-23 school year, 150 percent higher than the previous school year. In October, Education Minister Gabriel Attal announced that students who had disrupted a moment of silence on October 16 in honor of two individuals killed by Islamists would not be allowed to return to school. Also in October, the government ended financial assistance to the largest Islamic high school in the country following concerns about foreign financing and course material that included a prohibition against apostasy. Following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel and a subsequent fatal terrorist attack in Arras, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne announced the government was elevating the domestic alert status to the highest possible level, enabling the government to enhance security at places of worship. The Prime Minister and two former presidents led a march against antisemitism in Paris in November. Authorities banned pro-Palestinian demonstrations, citing serious risks of disturbances to public order amid heightened tensions linked to the events in the Gaza Strip and a rise in antisemitic acts. In June, President Emmanuel Macron announced a national campaign supporting religious heritage sites, and in a January speech, Interior Minister Darmanin said, “Our secularism is not the erasure of our religions ... it is the possibility for each religion to flourish.”

In coordination with the Interior Ministry, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF) reported the total number of antisemitic acts during the year nearly quadrupled to 1,676, up from 436 in 2022. The report indicated that antisemitic acts increased by 1,000 percent since the October 7 Hamas attacks, with 1,242 acts reported after that date, equaling that of the previous three years combined. In one incident, an Avignon court sentenced a woman to five months in prison after she spat on a Jewish man wearing a kippah bearing the Star of David, which, according to news reports, he had been hiding under a cap. According to a September survey of university students, 91 percent of Jewish students experienced antisemitism and 77 percent believed antisemitism was pervasive in higher education, a view shared by only 28 percent among the total

student population. In December, the Israeli Aliyah and Integration Ministry and the Jewish Agency for Israel announced there was a 430 percent increase in the number of French applications to emigrate to Israel since October 7. In November, unidentified individuals vandalized a mosque near Bordeaux with graffiti that included messages such as, “Your coffins or your suitcases.” There were incidents of vandalism against Christian churches and a Jewish cemetery.

Officials from the U.S. embassy, consulates general, and American presence posts (APPs) discussed religious tolerance, antisemitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in combating violent extremism, and cooperation on these issues with officials at the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the Interministerial Delegation to Fight against Racism, Antisemitism, and Anti-LGBT Hate (DILCRAH). The Ambassador and senior U.S. government officials met regularly with religious communities and their leaders throughout the country to discuss religious freedom concerns and encourage interfaith cooperation and tolerance, including engaging Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Strasbourg, Paris, Marseille, Rennes, Bordeaux, Lyon, and Toulouse and raising Holocaust awareness in Marseille and Strasbourg. In January, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith event for religious and community leaders and government officials to underscore the importance of unity and solidarity to combat rising global religious hatred. The event also launched an embassy initiative to highlight how religious tolerance can be a powerful tool for social inclusion. Following the October 7 terrorist attacks in Israel, the embassy, consulates, and APPs met with local representatives of the Jewish community, student groups, and others to express support and discuss ways to combat rising antisemitism. The embassy regularly used social media to convey messages pertaining to religious freedom.

Section I.

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 68.2 million (midyear 2023). According to a 2022 report released by the government-appointed Interministerial Committee on Secularism, based on a poll conducted in cooperation with polling company Viavoice, approximately 48 percent of respondents in mainland France and overseas territories and departments identify as Roman Catholic, 4 percent Muslim, 3 percent Protestant, 2 percent Buddhist, 1 percent Jewish, 1 percent Orthodox Christian, and 1 percent other religious groups; 34 percent said they have no religious affiliation, and 7 percent did not respond. According to a May survey by the research firm French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP), 46 percent of respondents identified as Christian, 6 percent as Muslim, 2 percent with other religions, 3 percent preferred not to say, and 40 percent reported no religious affiliation.

Most observers, including the Observatory for Secularism in a 2019 report, estimate the number of Muslims in the country at three to five million, or between 4 and 7 percent of the population. According to the group’s 2019 report, there are 140,000 to 150,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses and 150,000 to 300,000 Hindus. According to Church of Scientology leaders, there are approximately 40,000 followers in the country.

In a poll on secularism released in 2022 and conducted with Viavoice, 37 percent of respondents identified as believers, 31 percent nonbelievers or atheist, 15 percent agnostic, and 10 percent indifferent. According to an IFOP April poll, 56 percent of respondents said they do not believe in God, and 44 percent said they do. The highest percentage of believers (50 percent) was found among those 65 and older and the lowest (36 percent) among those between the ages of 18 and 24. Other age groups were close to evenly split, with a slight majority of nonbelievers.

Section II.

Status Of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution defines the country as a secular republic and states it “shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law,” regardless of religion, and shall respect all beliefs. The law provides for the separation of religion and state and guarantees the free exercise of religious worship except to maintain public order.

The law, as well as international and European covenants to which the country adheres, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of €1,500 (\$1,700) and imprisonment for one month. Defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of any law they say impedes their freedom of religion.

Laws increase the penalties for acts of violence or defamation when they are committed because of the victim’s actual or perceived membership or nonmembership in a given religious group. Additional penalties beyond those for the underlying crime for acts of violence that courts determine are religiously motivated are imprisonment for three years to life and fines of €45,000 to €75,000 (\$50,000 to \$83,000), depending on the severity of the victim’s injuries. For religiously motivated acts of public defamation, defined as an allegation that affects the honor of a person or body, the penalties are imprisonment for one year, a fine of €45,000 (\$50,000), or both. The government may expel noncitizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

The law penalizes hate crimes and hate speech. Provisions in the criminal code cover hate crimes. They criminalize racist, antisemitic, or xenophobic acts, considering them as aggravating circumstances when an offense is committed based on a victim’s membership or nonmembership, true or supposed, in an ethnic group, nation, race, or religion. When made in public, such as on the internet, hate speech is covered by a special law related to the rights of the press that criminalizes the publication or dissemination of racist remarks, including those directed against persons because of their membership in religious groups. The law covers all means of public expression (for example, speeches, exclamations, threats, writings, printed matter, drawings, engravings, paintings, symbols, and images) and any media permitting wide dissemination to the public. When not made in public, hate speech is covered by the criminal code and punishable by a €1,500 (\$1,700) fine.

There is no national-level law prohibiting blasphemy, but the Alsace-Moselle region (currently comprised of the Moselle, Bas-Rhin, and Haut-Rhin Departments, also known as Alsace-Lorraine) continues to retain a law that declares “blasphemy against Catholics” a crime. A superseding Ministry of Justice decree states, however, that the antiblephemy provision may not be applied anywhere in the country, including in Alsace-Moselle.

Although the law does not require it, religious groups may apply for official recognition and tax-exempt status. Religious groups may register under two categories: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organize only religious activities. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in for-profit as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both categories. For example, Catholics perform religious activities through their associations of worship and operate schools through their cultural associations.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture (the administrative body, headed by a prefect, that represents the central government in each department) for recognition as an association of worship and tax-exempt status. To qualify as an association of worship, the group’s sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include liturgical services and practices, religious training, and the construction of buildings serving the religious group. The association must also

engage in public worship and respect public order. Among excluded activities are those that are purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. To apply for tax-exempt status, the association must provide to the prefecture its estimated budget for the year, annual accounts for the previous three years, or since the association's creation, whichever is shorter, a written justification of eligibility for the status, and the number of members of the association. In Paris, the association must have a minimum of 25 members. Once granted, the association may use the tax-exempt status nationwide. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in conformity with its tax-exempt status, however, the government may change that status and require the association to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to ministry data more than a decade old, the most recent available, there are 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations with tax-exempt status.

The number of cultural associations, many of which are not associated with religious groups, is in the thousands and changes frequently. Cultural associations may register using an online form through the government's public administration website. Cultural associations, even if associated with religious groups, may operate without applying for government recognition, but are not exempt from all taxes. The Church of Scientology has the status of a secular, rather than religious, association.

The law states, "detained persons have the right to freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion. They may practice the religion of their choice ... without other limits than those imposed by the security needs and good order of the institution."

Counterterrorism legislation grants prefects in each department the authority to close a place of worship for a maximum of six months if they find that comments, writings, or activities in the place of worship "provoke violence, hatred, or discrimination or the commission of acts of terrorism or praise such acts of terrorism." The management of the place of worship has 48 hours to appeal the closure decision to an administrative court. A place of worship that has been closed may remain closed beyond the six-month maximum if it does not replace its chief cleric and/or management. Noncompliance with a closure decision carries a six-month prison sentence and a fine of €7,500 (\$8,300). A counterterrorism and intelligence law allows authorities to close facilities belonging to places of worship linked to acts of terrorism, rather than only the places of worship themselves.

The law prohibits covering one's face, including for religious reasons, in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces, such as restaurants and movie theaters. If police encounter a person in a public space wearing a face covering such as a niqab or burqa, they are legally required to ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. According to the law, police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. Police may not question or hold an individual for more than four hours. Refusing a police instruction to remove a face-covering garment carries a maximum fine of €150 (\$170) or attendance at a citizenship course. Individuals who coerce other persons to cover their face on account of gender by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority are subject to a fine of up to €30,000 (\$33,100) and may receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the person coerced is a minor. The law exempts use of face coverings mandated by the authorities, such as masks worn for COVID-19 prevention.

The law prohibits agents of the government, public services, and companies or associations carrying out public services from demonstrating their religion through visible signs of religious affiliation, such as an Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, or Christian cross. The prohibition applies during working hours even if the agents are not in their place of employment and at any time at the place of employment.

By law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new places of worship, except, as noted below, in Alsace-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. The law also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The state owns and is

responsible for the upkeep of most places of worship, primarily Catholic, built before 1905. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

The Upholding Republican Values law includes requirements for neutrality in expression and attire for public servants and private contractors of public services, methods to combat online hate speech, restrictions on homeschooling, measures requiring publicly funded associations to respect the “principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and respect of human dignity,” measures regarding transparency of religious associations, and measures against polygamy, forced marriages, and “virginity certificates.” The law requires audits of associations, including those that are religious in nature, that receive foreign funding of more than €153,000 (\$169,000) per year. The law imposes additional reporting requirements on local religious-based organizations and punishes incitement to religious discrimination, hatred, or violence with up to five years in prison. The law also increases the previous punishment for holding political meetings in places of worship and prohibits the organization of campaigning operations for political elections in places of worship. In addition, a judge may forbid anyone convicted of provoking terrorism, discrimination, hate, or violence from entering places of worship. The government may temporarily close places of worship if it finds any activities therein that incite hatred or violence. The law applies requirements for neutrality, impartiality, and principles of secularism to private contractors for public services as well as government employees. The law establishes a commemorative “secularism day,” to be recognized annually on December 9. In addition, it requires municipalities and departments to inform local prefects three months before concluding a long-term lease with, or providing loans to, places of worship.

The Upholding Republican Values law’s provisions on hate speech include criminalizing the dissemination of personal information “for the purpose of exposing him or her, or members of his or her family, to a direct risk of harm to the person or property that the author could not have been unaware of.” Violators may be punished with up to five years in prison and a fine of €75,000 (\$83,000) if the victim is a public official, a journalist, or a minor. An expedited procedure allows authorities to remove content on mirror sites.

The law separating religion and state does not apply in three classes of territories. In Alsace-Moselle, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Pastors, priests, and rabbis of these four recognized faiths in Alsace-Moselle receive a salary from the Interior Ministry, and the country’s President, with the agreement of the Holy See, appoints the Catholic bishops of Metz and Strasbourg. The Prime Minister appoints the Chief Rabbi and the presidents of the Jewish and Protestant consistories (the administrative governance bodies of these groups) in Alsace-Moselle, and the Minister of Interior appoints priests and ministers of three Christian churches (Catholic, Lutheran, and the [Calvinist] Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine) in the region. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. The Overseas Department of French Guiana may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Other overseas departments and overseas territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This provision also applies to the portion of Antarctica the government claims as an overseas territory.

The law prohibits public school employees from wearing visible signs of religious affiliation and students from wearing “conspicuous religious symbols,” including the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. The Education Ministry published a memorandum on August 31 stating the law includes a ban on abayas for females and *khamis* and *jalabiyas* (long robes) for males. Public schools do not provide religious instruction except in Alsace-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. In Alsace-Moselle, religious education in one of the four recognized faiths (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine, and Judaism) is compulsory in public primary and secondary schools, although students may, with a written request from their parents, opt for a secular equivalent. Religious education classes are taught by laypersons who are trained and nominated by the respective religious groups but are paid by the state. Elsewhere in the country, public schools teach information about religious groups as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their

children to wear conspicuous religious symbols or to receive religious instruction may homeschool their children provided they meet the requirements to do so or send them to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools; however, private schools may permit the wearing of religious symbols on their premises. Under the Upholding Republican Values law, homeschooling is allowed under limited circumstances, including cases involving sickness, disability, intensive sport or artistic training, transient families, moral or physical safety (which could include religion) or those with geographic constraints. Parents who wish to take their children out of school are required to get an annual authorization from the local education authority.

By law, the government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. In 98 percent of private schools, in accordance with the law, the government pays the teachers' salaries, provided the school accepts all children regardless of their religious affiliation. The law does not address the issue of religious instruction in government-subsidized private schools. According to the education code, religious instruction is allowed but optional in government-subsidized private schools. Students are not required to attend religion classes, and other activities are available for students who opt out.

Missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before traveling to the country. All missionaries from nonexempt countries wishing to remain longer than 90 days must obtain long-duration visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must provide a letter from their sponsoring religious group to apply to the local prefecture for a temporary residence card.

The country adheres to the nonbinding Terezin Declaration of 2009, which calls for the restitution of property seized from Jews during the Holocaust and advocates accurate Holocaust commemoration and education and open archives. The government has laws and mechanisms in place for property restitution and reparation, including for all three types of movable and immovable property: private, communal, and heirless.

On July 13, parliament unanimously passed a bill to facilitate the restitution of artworks looted from Jews during Germany's Nazi era (1933-1945). The law creates a general framework to streamline the process for returning looted property in public collections. Before this law, each restitution to rightful owners from public collections required the passage of a separate law. The new law allows for the removal of items from public collections after consultation with the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation (CIVS or the "Drai Commission").

The government's Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation is a sovereign and independent administrative body under the authority of the Prime Minister. CIVS recommends and examines reparations to individual victims of the Holocaust or their heirs not previously compensated for damages resulting from antisemitic legislation passed either by the Vichy government, the collaborationist regime allied with Nazi Germany from 1940 to 1944, or by the occupying Germans.

The law criminalizes the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement against Israel, treating it as "a provocation to discrimination or hatred or violence towards a person or a group of persons because of their origin or belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race, or a determined religion."

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

On April 5, then Junior Minister for Citizenship Sonia Backes reported that in 2022, as part of a nationwide program to counter “Islamism and communitarianism,” the Ministry of Interior conducted 3,000 assessments and closed 187 establishments of various kinds, including seven mosques – which were temporarily closed – and 11 schools, including an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school, and sports and cultural establishments and restaurants. The government also dissolved five Islamist associations.

On February 1, the cabinet council dissolved the Islamist association “Les Alertes,” (the whistleblowers), which according to the government advocated radical Islam and made antisemitic and homophobic comments. The government also accused the association of minimizing terrorist attacks in France and justifying them in the name of “blasphemy.”

On January 13, authorities permitted the mosque in Allonnes in the northwestern part of the country to reopen following its closure in October 2021 due to accusations of promoting radical Islam and legitimizing jihad and terrorism, accusations that were contested by the mosque’s former leaders. The reopening guidelines mandated filming sermons and ensuring the imam be considered qualified by authorities. Following the closure, members of the mosque formed a new association, implementing measures such as paying rent to the city for their premises and selecting a new imam to prevent future issues. According to media reports citing worshippers, despite some reservations about being monitored, the local Muslim community welcomed the mosque’s reopening, seeing it as essential for the locality’s well-being and an opportunity to present a peaceful image of Islam. The two associations which previously managed the mosque were dissolved.

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

On March 6, Jehovah’s Witnesses filed an administrative appeal against the 2021 annual report, issued in late 2022, of the Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) to delete “the defamatory passages” and to “rectify the serious omissions and errors” in the report. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the 2021 MIVILUDES report “failed to follow basic scientific methodology and is not supported by any authoritative scientific works,” and “unlawfully stigmatizes the more than 136,000 peaceful citizens of France who are Jehovah’s Witnesses.” In their 2023 annual report published in November, the Jehovah’s Witnesses stated that although only 2 percent of complaints to MIVILUDES involved Jehovah’s Witnesses, MIVILUDES devoted nearly 20 percent of its 2021 report to what the religious group referred to as “unsubstantiated and defamatory claims” against it.

In December, a Jehovah’s Witnesses representative expressed concern regarding a bill being drafted by MIVILUDES that would define “sectarian aberrations” and broaden the scope of the law to include abuse of victims in a state of weakness and psychological or physical subjugation. The representative stated the proposed legislation could restrict the religious practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

On January 13, Belgian authorities deported Hassan Iquioussen, an imam born in France with Moroccan citizenship, to Morocco. Iquioussen had fled to Belgium in the wake of an August 2022 French Council of State decision to deport him to Morocco, following accusations from the Ministry of Interior that he incited hate, discrimination, and violence, notably against the Jewish community, in public addresses between 2003 and 2019. In a decision on June 15, following an appeal of his deportation order, which was submitted in September 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) unanimously declared Iquioussen’s application inadmissible. In his appeal, Iquioussen stated that he faced the risk of inhumane and degrading treatment if deported to Morocco. The ECHR ruled as inadmissible the basis of Iquioussen’s appeal, which was predicated on European Convention on Human Rights articles related to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression, prohibition of torture, and the right to a fair trial. The ECHR also determined that Iquioussen had not exhausted all legal remedies before appealing to the court, since an appeal of his deportation order was still pending before the Paris Administrative Court.

According to a parliamentary report published in 2022, as of 2018, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the penitentiary system employed 720 Catholic, 361 Protestant, 231 Muslim, 191 Jehovah's Witnesses, 74 Jewish, 60 Orthodox Christian, and 18 Buddhist chaplains. While there were no statistics on detainees' religious affiliation, sources stated that approximately 25 percent of detainees requested a special menu during Ramadan. In detainee visiting areas, visitors could bring religious objects to an inmate, or speak with the prisoner about religious issues, but could not pray. Prisoners could pray in their cells individually, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments where they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

Minister of Interior Darmanin announced on August 7 the dissolution of Civitas, described by multiple sources as a far-right party comprising mostly ultra-traditional Catholics, due to the party's antisemitism. Darmanin's action followed antisemitic remarks during the party's summer seminar in July, at which Pierre Hillard, known for espousing conspiracy theories, told his audience that before the French Revolution, Jews and other religious minorities could not become French citizens because they were "heretics," and that "maybe we should go back to how things were before 1789." Several politicians and Jewish organizations quickly condemned the remarks. "There is no room for antisemitism in our country," Darmanin said in a social media post. "I firmly condemn these despicable comments and am taking the matter to the national prosecutor," he said.

On June 29, the Council of State upheld a ban on women soccer players wearing the hijab enacted by the country's soccer federation (FFF). The court ruled that the FFF was entitled to ban headscarves in matches. The Council of State issued its ruling after an organized group of headscarf-wearing soccer players called "Les Hijabeuses" – a contraction of the words hijab and *footballeuses*, or women footballers (soccer players) – campaigned against the ban and launched legal action. The Council of State said sports federations "may impose on their players an obligation to wear neutral clothing during sporting competitions and events, in order to guarantee the smooth running of matches and prevent clashes or confrontation. It considers the ban imposed by the FFF to be appropriate and proportionate." The Council of State did not follow its public rapporteur's recommendations, who said on June 26 that the federation's rules prohibiting "the wearing of any sign or dress ostensibly manifesting a religious affiliation" during matches and competitions should be annulled. On June 27, Interior Minister Darmanin, speaking on RTL radio, expressed opposition to the wearing of the hijab during sports competitions. "You don't wear religious clothes when you play sports," he stated. "When you play soccer, you don't need to know the religion of the person in front of you." The government's support of the FFF hijab ban was in contrast to the former Minister of Gender Equality's opposition to a government ban on headscarves and other "ostensible religious symbols" during sports competitions in 2022 draft legislation, which was later withdrawn.

On September 24, the Sports Ministry issued a decision prohibiting French athletes from wearing the hijab at the 2024 Paris Olympics. On September 26, in response to the decision, UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Marta Hurtado expressed opposition to dress codes that dictated women's attire. Hurtado emphasized the importance of nondiscrimination, citing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which France is a party. Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera reiterated the government's stance against religious symbols in sports, citing the need for neutrality. She said the decision aligned with the country's strict secularism policies, which include laws against "ostentatious" religious symbols in certain public contexts.

On June 5, during a visit celebrating the millennium of the Catholic abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy, President Macron outlined a national campaign supporting religious heritage. On September 15, as he was visiting Semur-en-Auxois and Bussy-Rabutin, Burgundy, Macron appealed to the nation's generosity in launching a fundraising campaign to restore religious buildings needing repair. The aim was to raise €200 million (\$221 million) in four years. For donations of up to €1,000 (\$1,100), the tax reduction of the contribution amount would be 75 percent, compared with 66 percent for standard contributions. The funds raised would be restricted to municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents in mainland France and 20,000 overseas. In September 21, an online *Fondation du patrimoine* (Foundation for Heritage) donation platform

opened, with the foundation selecting the projects where the need was most urgent. Criteria for selection include “heritage interest of the building,” “urgency,” and usage, “which must be open to concerts, exhibitions and conferences.” According to a Catholic News Agency article from 2021 that quoted the president of the Observatory of Religious Heritage in Paris, France was losing a religious building every two weeks due to demolition, transformation, destruction by fire, or collapse.

At a May 23 graduation ceremony in Paris in which Minister of the Interior Darmanin addressed religious leaders at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Religious World, Darmanin stated his ministry’s commitment to protecting religious freedom and outlined sources of state support available for places of worship. These included a national fund to increase security, funding for accessibility renovations, and Darmanin’s ongoing work with Christophe Bechu, Minister for Ecological Transition, to develop a legislative provision to fund energy efficiency.

On October 13, following a fatal terrorist attack in Arras and in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, Prime Minister Borne announced the government was elevating the domestic alert status to the highest possible level. The elevated alert level enabled the government to enhance security at places of worship and public facilities, and it authorized exceptional measures to include closure of subways and highways and alerts to the population. At the same time, Operation Sentinelle (a long-standing military domestic security operation created after 2015 ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris, under the purview of the Ministry of Interior), was expanded to 7,000 soldiers. Places of worship were among sensitive sites covered by the operation.

Similar to the two previous years, on September 8, Minister of Interior Darmanin issued a memo to prefects regarding the Jewish month of Tishrei (September 15 to October 8), which includes Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and other Jewish holidays, asking them to strengthen security for Jewish places of worship and to ensure maximum police presence due to the “very high level of the terrorist threat.” Counterterrorism patrols under Operation Sentinelle using military forces could again also be deployed around particularly vulnerable sites, according to the memo. The Ministry of Interior took similar measures at “symbolic and sensitive” Catholic churches in the country on August 15, the Day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and for All-Saints Day on November 1.

In an October 10 interview, Interior Minister Darmanin said that 10,000 police officers were deployed to protect 500 Jewish sites across the country. Darmanin said he had asked France’s FBI equivalent, the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI,) to produce a daily memo on the number of antisemitic incidents.

On April 21, the Paris Special Criminal Court found guilty and sentenced, in absentia, Lebanese-Canadian academic Hassan Diab to life in prison for the 1980 bombing of a Paris synagogue that killed four persons. The judges followed the counterterrorism prosecutors’ request for the maximum possible punishment. The court also issued an arrest warrant for Diab, 69, who lives in Canada. The President of CRIF, Yonathan Arfi, welcomed the conviction, and urged Canada to arrest Diab.

Walid Abdulrahman Abou Zayed, a suspect in a 1982 terrorist attack against an Israeli restaurant in Paris that left six dead and wounded 22 others, remained in pretrial detention at year’s end, charged with murder and attempted murder. Norwegian authorities extradited him to France in late 2020.

Following the reconstruction in 2020 of a statue of the Virgin Mary that had been destroyed in La Flotte-en-Re along the west coast, the Federation of Freedom of Thought of Charente-Maritime won a court case to have it moved to private land. The municipality appealed on grounds that the statue was part of the town’s heritage. On October 18, the Council of State rejected the appeal in accordance with the 1905 law prohibiting “the installation of any religious insignia on public property.” The mayor stated his intention to comply.

On January 27, a Paris court directed Christie’s auction house to return “The Penitent Magdalene” by Adriaen van der Werff, a painting looted by the Nazis, to the heirs of Lionel Hauser, a cousin of writer Marcel Proust. The painting, seized in October 1942, resurfaced when its owner approached Christie’s for sale in 2017; the auction house had previously sold it in 2005. Christie’s investigation

confirmed the painting's provenance from Hauser's collection and its listing in records of war-time plunder in France. The court also ordered Christie's to pay €10,000 (\$11,000) to Hauser's heirs and disclose the painting's current owner and location.

On April 5, then Junior Minister for Citizenship Backes reported authorities had closed 11 schools in 2022 for not complying with the Upholding Republican Values law. Elements of noncompliance included failure to teach the values of the French Republic, lack of citizenship education, and failure to teach about the wartime Vichy regime and the Holocaust.

On August 24, media unveiled an official memorandum reporting 4,710 infringements of the secularism law in schools for the school year 2022-2023, 150 percent more than the previous school year. Incidents included refusing to sit for certain lessons and wearing religious symbols and religious clothing.

Education Minister Attal announced during an August 27 television interview a ban on abayas and the khamis for men in public schools, clarifying an ambiguous policy left by his predecessor, noting the measure was in conformity with the law banning conspicuous religious symbols in schools per the country's concept of "*laïcité*" (a form of secularism that involves separation of state and religious activities).

On September 7, the Council of State the country's highest administrative court, upheld the government's ban on wearing an abaya in public schools, stating it was in conformity with the 2004 law banning the display of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools. The administrative judges ruled the ban did not violate fundamental freedoms and did not cause "serious or obviously illegal harm to the respect for personal lives, freedom of religion, the right to education, the well-being of children, or the principle of nondiscrimination." The ruling responded to an emergency petition by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Action for the Rights of Muslims. Education Minister Attal described the ban as a "refinement of current policies aimed at reducing growing conflicts over religious attire in public schools." President Macron backed the measure, citing the defense of secularism as a central justification. He specifically referenced the 2020 killing of Samuel Paty, a teacher who was beheaded by Abdoullakh Abouyezidovich Anzorov after showing caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad during a lesson on free speech, as evidence of the pressing need for such a ban. Muslim advocacy groups stated the ban unfairly targeted Muslim girls. The French Council of the Muslim Faith denounced the decision, stating the abaya was not a religious symbol but a fashion choice for those preferring a modest form of dress. On September 5, Education Minister Attal reported 298 girls wore an abaya for the first day of the school term on September 5. He said most of them agreed to change out of the dress, but 67 refused and were sent home.

On October 16, schools commemorated the third anniversary of the killing of Samuel Paty with a series of ceremonies and screenings of documentaries on freedom of speech. During an October 14 special ceremony at the Sorbonne in Paris, Prime Minister Borne said the teaching profession had the government's unwavering support. "School is the first face of our democracy," she stated. On October 22, Education Minister Attal announced in a news interview that 183 students, who had disrupted a moment of silence on October 16 in honor of Dominique Bernard, a teacher killed in Arras on October 13, and of Samuel Paty, had been suspended from school and would not be allowed to return from the autumn break. Attal said that a disciplinary council would review the incidents to determine whether the students would be allowed to return eventually. Overall, he noted that more than 500 disruptions or actions contesting the national moment of silence in schools had been reported.

Restrictions on home schooling under the Upholding Republican Values law, continued, and parents wishing to homeschool their children needed to receive an annual authorization from local education authorities. Sources stated the government introduced the restrictions on homeschooling to prevent radicalization of youth. On April 5, then Junior Minister for Citizenship Backes reported the number of homeschooling requests had decreased by 30 percent between 2021 and 2022, and that the rejection rate for requests was at 10 percent.

Human rights groups and teachers' unions requested an inquiry after police sent emails asking school directors in Toulouse to provide information on the number of pupils absent on Eid al-Fitr on April 21. According to media reports, the police were acting on a request from the intelligence services. The police request was "particularly shocking in that it associates Muslim religious practice with the issue of security," said human rights group SOS Racisme. Responding to the criticism, the Ministry of Interior said in a May 21 statement that it asked some schools to evaluate the rate of absenteeism on that occasion but denied the request was a census of religious belief. The ministry "regularly studies the impact of some religious festivals on the workings of public services, and notably in the educational sector," the statement said. Observers noted that students were permitted to take a day off to take part in religious holidays, including Eid-al-Fitr, provided the request was made in advance.

On October 18, the prefect of the North Department and the Hauts-de-France Region, Georges-Francois Leclerc, summoned the heads of the Averroes high school, the largest Islamic high school in the country with an enrollment of 450, to inform them of the government's intention to cancel the contract linking the high school with the state and providing public funding to the school. This decision was taken after an inspection by the Regional General Accounting Office, whose rapporteurs stated in May that the school, which was highly dependent on private donations, should "make the monitoring of individual loans more reliable and clarify the identity of donors." The report stated that a book in an optional second-year Muslim ethics course outlined rules to be followed that included a prohibition against apostasy on pain of death and emphasized the supremacy of divine law. In October 2022, an administrative court had ordered the Hauts-de-France Region to pay €500,000 (\$552,000) in subsidies after the region had blocked the funds due to suspicions that a Qatari foundation was financing the school. Regional authorities then announced they would appeal the ruling to the Council of State. In a December 11 decision, regional authorities ended their contract with the high school, citing irregularities in its management and concerns that elements of its teaching did not respect French values. According to media reports, in a letter addressed to the school the local prefecture outlined "serious shortcomings" including a lack of resources on gender equality and LGBTQ+ issues, and overrepresentation of religious Islamic works. It also singled out a course on Muslim ethics that it said contained aspects "contrary to the values of the French Republic." The letter – signed by prefect Leclerc – criticized the school's administrators for lack of transparency and financial dysfunction, media reported.

On October 20, the Lyon Administrative Court of Appeal ruled that a woman who joined the Apostolic Sisters of Saint-Jean religious order nevertheless had to repay a €37,335 (\$41,300) student loan that was granted contingent on her fulfilling a 10-year public service obligation upon graduation. The court ruled she had to comply with the requirement, stating her financial hardship "results from her choice to join an order where members, having taken a vow of poverty, do not receive payment for their activities."

On November 12, France and UNESCO announced a new partnership to prevent and combat an increasing number of antisemitic acts in schools and universities. As described in a government announcement, the partnership is based on two pillars: training teachers and all educational professionals, at every level of education, to "deconstruct" stereotypes and prejudices, raising their awareness of contemporary forms of antisemitism, and helping them protect victims in classes or in extracurricular and sports activities; and both raising awareness among and urging political decision-makers to ensure that educational policies throughout Europe make the fight against antisemitism one of their priorities. The government committed €600,000 (\$663,000) in initial funding for program implementation.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

On October 21, Minister of Interior Darmanin said the country deported 89 radicalized foreign Islamists during the year. In 2021, Darmanin said he had instructed regional prefects to refuse residence permits for imams sent by a foreign government; according to the Ministry of Interior 2021 figures, approximately 70 percent of all imams in the country had been trained in foreign countries, such as Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria. In 2020, President Macron announced he would

phase out the foreign imam program by 2024, creating instead a program for imams to be trained in France. On December 29, the government announced that as of January 1, 2024, the country would no longer accept foreign imams to practice in France.

President Macron welcomed representatives from major religious groups at a ceremony at the Elysee Palace on January 9, an annual tradition in which he was accompanied by Prime Minister Borne and Interior Minister Darmanin. Macron addressed the ongoing debate on euthanasia. Religious representatives called for “absolute respect” for life. According to Christian Krieger, the President of the Protestant Federation of France, as told to AFP, Macron said he intended to move forward on the topic “in a respectful way,” finding a middle ground. Macron also said he would consult all the religious authorities once national consultations were completed. Discussing engagement with the Muslim community, Macron noted the Forum of Islam of France (FORIF) launched in February 2022. Chief Rabbi of France Haim Korsia said Macron emphasized the potential for religion to be used as a powerful resource for peace in conflicts between Ukraine and Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Macron also stressed the importance of protecting freedom of belief and the practice of religion in France, according to the Chief Rabbi.

In a January 31 speech at the Protestant Federation’s New Year’s ceremony, Interior Minister Darmanin said, “Our secularism is not the erasure of our religions, neither from the public space nor from the private space, but that it is the possibility for each religion to flourish.” The Minister offered support for the Protestant Federation while respecting the legal separation of church and state.

One year after its launch, FORIF held its third plenary session February 2, with Interior Minister Darmanin in attendance. According to media reports, the session formulated a “job description” for imams, allowing mosque representatives to tailor their recruitment to specific needs. It also initiated a one-year pilot for a National Council of Muslim Chaplaincy, which would act as a liaison with authorities for nominating chaplains in the military, hospitals, and prisons. Additionally, the session created a national association dedicated to securing Islamic worship places and aiding victims of anti-Muslim acts. In partnership with the French Banking Federation, the session established a national association and a guide, created to enhance understanding of banking regulations and improve interactions between religious actors and banks. The government established FORIF, comprising local representatives rather than foreign-affiliated mosque federations, to replace the French Council of Muslim Worship, which Minister Darmanin declared “dead” in December 2021.

On January 27, to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the 78th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, then Minister for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities Isabelle Rome visited the Shoah Memorial in Paris, while Secretary of State for Veterans Affairs and Memory Patricia Miralles visited Auschwitz. The Ministry of Education also invited teachers and students to participate in special activities to reflect on the Holocaust.

At the annual CRIF dinner on February 13, Prime Minister Borne spoke about her father’s deportation and his experience during the Holocaust. The 1,000-person audience included political and religious leaders, diplomatic representatives, unions, media personalities, and artists. Borne said, “Among the survivors, some managed to keep the taste of hope and faith in life, while others did not... I know that very well.” She called for “combating antisemitism with all our strength.” Despite a recorded decline in antisemitic acts in 2022, Borne said the Jews of France were among the first targets of radical Islam, which threatened the entire French Republic. She also called attention to the stated need to continue teaching about the Holocaust in schools and through visits to memorials in a recently published plan to combat racism, antisemitism, and discrimination.

President Macron and government ministers condemned antisemitism and declared support for Holocaust education on several occasions, including the March 20 commemoration of the 11th anniversary of the killings of three Jewish elementary school children and their Jewish teacher in Toulouse and of three French paratroopers in Montauban by an Islamist terrorist and the April 30 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration. On April 24, the country held annual ceremonies commemorating the thousands of persons deported to Nazi death camps during World War II. On

July 17, Secretary of State for Veterans' Affairs and Memory Patricia Miralles attended a ceremony commemorating the 81st anniversary of the "Velodrome d'Hiver" roundup of Jewish French citizens.

On April 5, Minister of Interior Darmanin attended an iftar hosted by the Great Mosque of Paris in honor of the ambassadors of Muslim-majority countries. In his speech, the Minister stressed that security forces were always present to protect mosques throughout the country, especially during Ramadan. He said the authorities were closely monitoring antireligious incidents, which were usually motivated by hatred and hate speech, targeting places of worship of different religions.

Prime Minister Borne and Minister of Interior Darmanin were among those officially welcoming Pope Francis to Marseille at the close of a regional meeting of Catholic bishops. During his visit, Pope Francis led a prayer for migrants who had died at sea and condemned what he termed was a lack of humanity for the migrants' plight. On September 23, President Macron met in private with Pope Francis and discussed global migration, end-of-life issues, and poverty before attending a papal Mass at a local stadium.

On November 11 at the Grand Mosque of Paris, Interior Minister Darmanin, while commemorating Muslim soldiers who died in World War I, called on members of the Muslim community to better organize and more effectively express their concerns. He said the community's self-identification by national origins and a lack of unity were obstacles to effective organization. When asked about perceived double standards in treatment, such as different security measures for mosques and synagogues and the bans on pro-Palestinian demonstrations, Darmanin highlighted the government's financial support for the security of the Muslim community. He emphasized what he stated was France's commitment to treating all its citizens equally, acknowledging discrimination but questioning whether it stemmed from religious or racial differences. Darmanin also underlined the importance of French Islam organizing independently, without foreign influence, while recognizing the challenge posed by what he termed was a small, yet vocal, radical Islamist faction.

In response to the call launched by the leaders of the parliament's upper and lower houses, approximately 180,000 persons marched peacefully against antisemitism across France on November 12, including 105,000 in Paris. Prime Minister Borne, 34 high level government officials, former Presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and **Francois** Hollande, political party representatives, human rights activists, and Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant representatives took part in the march, whose theme was "For the Republic, against anti-Semitism." On the eve of the event, President Macron – who did not take part – put out a statement expressing support for the protest and calling on citizens to rise up against "the unbearable resurgence of unbridled antisemitism."

On November 13, President Macron met with a wide spectrum of religious leaders for talks on combating antisemitism as "a continuation of the appeal for national unity and brotherhood," the President had made in his statement prior to the antisemitism march. During the meeting, Macron urged religious leaders to make an "educational effort to increase the number of measures addressed to young people," Catholic Archbishop of Reims and president of the Bishops' Conference of France Eric de Moulins-Beaufort told reporters after the meeting.

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

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In coordination with the Interior Ministry, CRIF reported that antisemitic acts during the year nearly quadrupled to 1,676, up from 436 in 2022. The report indicated that antisemitic acts increased by 1,000 percent since the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks, with 1,242 acts reported, equaling that of the previous three years combined. On November 14, Interior Minister Darmanin announced authorities registered 1,762 antisemitic, 564 anti-Christian, and 131 anti-Muslim acts

since the beginning of the year. He told media that antisemitic acts had “exploded” since the October 7 Hamas attacks in Israel, with 1,518 antisemitic incidents and 600 arrests (including 130 foreign nationals) since the attacks.

On March 29, the Nantes criminal court sentenced Emmanuel Abayisenga, a Rwandan asylum seeker accused of the 2021 killing of Olivier Maire, a Catholic priest in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sevre, to four years in prison for arson of the Catholic cathedral in Nantes in 2020. In addition to the sentence, the court banned Abayisenga from the Loire-Atlantique region, where Nantes is located, for five years, and prohibited him from bearing weapons. In October 2022, the regional prosecutor announced that Abayisenga, who was discharged from a psychiatric hospital and formally charged, was placed in pretrial detention. At year’s end, he was awaiting trial for Father Maire’s killing.

On June 12, a group of approximately 12 youths assaulted a priest in his Maronite church in Lyon and shouted anti-Christian slogans. Minister of Interior Darmanin expressed his support to the priest. Police arrested three suspects.

On September 13, the Marseille Prosecutor’s Office announced the opening of an investigation after a September 9 attack on a Jewish university student. The local branch of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions stated the kippah-wearing man, while en route to a Marseille synagogue, was attacked by a driver who yelled antisemitic insults, demanded he kneel, and then reportedly stole his watch and two bracelets. At year’s end, the attacker remained at large. Marseille political figures strongly condemned the attack.

On November 6, an Avignon court sentenced an 18-year-old woman to five months in prison for insulting an individual because of religion after she spat on a Jewish man wearing a kippah bearing the Star of David in the center of Avignon. According to press reports, the man had been wearing a cap to hide his kippah, and when the cap fell off in a confrontation revealing the kippah, the woman, who had been previously convicted on similar charges, spit on the man and trampled on the kippah and uttered antisemitic insults. Her sentence could be adjusted to monitoring by electronic bracelet in lieu of prison time.

Jehovah’s Witnesses officials reported seven incidents of physical assaults against their members during the year. They also reported four arrests of their members by local authorities while they were proselytizing during the year.

According to figures released by the Israeli government, 2,000 French Jews emigrated to Israel in 2022, a 43 percent decrease from the 3,500 who emigrated in 2021. According to statistics released in September by Ofek Israeli, the National Aliyah Promotion Company, 700 French citizens had emigrated to Israel from January to July. On December 17, the Israeli Aliyah and Integration Ministry and the Jewish Agency for Israel announced there was a 430 percent increase in the number of *Aliyah* (emigration to Israel) applications opened in France since October 7, according to data collected by the two organizations. In the period following October 7, there were Aliyah applications opened for approximately 1,200 persons, compared with approximately 220 in the corresponding period in 2022.

A September 28 survey conducted by IFOP and commissioned by the Union of Jewish Students of France found that 91 percent of Jewish students in French universities and higher education schools had experienced antisemitism during their studies. This included remarks conveying stereotypes about Jews (89 percent), “jokes” about the Holocaust or Jews (80 percent), insults (45 percent), and physical attacks (7 percent). Jewish students surveyed believed hatred of Israel (91 percent) and antisemitism (77 percent) were pervasive in France’s higher education, while only 28 percent felt the same among the total student population. According to the survey, 83 percent of Jewish students feared antisemitic violence from the far-left, compared with 63 percent from the far-right.

In May, the U.S.-based NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued the results of its survey of antisemitic prejudice in France, based on data collected in November and December 2022. The survey asked approximately 500 respondents whether 11 stereotypical statements about Jews were “probably true.” Based on responses, the ADL estimated 15 percent of all individuals over 18 in

France agreed that six or more statements were “probably true,” compared with 17 percent in 2019 and 17 percent in 2015. Among the statements were: “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to France” (37 percent); “Jews have too much power in international financial markets” (26 percent); “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust” (29 percent); “Jews don’t care about what happens to anyone but their own kind” (20 percent); “Jews have too much control over the global media” (19 percent); and “Jews are responsible for most of the world’s wars” (3 percent).

On July 4, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an advisory body to the Prime Minister, released its annual report, which included the results of an Ipsos survey, conducted in November 2022, using face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 1,214 residents over the age of 18. According to the survey, 38 percent (compared with 37 percent in 2021) of respondents believed Jews “have a particular relationship with money” and 18 percent (same as in 2021) thought Jews had too much power in the country. The survey found 30 percent (28 percent in 2021) of respondents had a negative image of Islam and 42 percent (38 percent in 2021) considered Islam a threat to national identity. The report cited what it said was persistent societal rejection of Islamic religious practices, finding, for example, that 49 percent of respondents (50 percent in 2021) considered that women wearing a veil “can pose a problem for living in society.”

On November 6, Chems-eddine Hafiz, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, and Mohsen NGazou, president of Muslims of France, released a joint press statement expressing concern about an increase in both Islamophobia and antisemitic acts and were working on imams’ “religious speeches” to make sure they conveyed “Islam’s message of peace and harmony.”

On November 15, authorities opened an investigation after the local prefecture announced that 10 Jewish gravestones were discovered damaged in a German World War I military cemetery in Moulin-sous-Touvent, in the Oise Department north of Paris. Speaking on a visit to the Bern, Switzerland, President Macron said he condemned “in the strongest possible terms” the damage done to the graves. He stated a personal commitment to “fight implacably and tirelessly against all forms of antisemitism.” The incident drew widespread condemnation, with various leaders and organizations calling for justice and highlighting the need to combat antisemitism.

On November 5, unidentified individuals vandalized a mosque in Pessac near Bordeaux with anti-Muslim graffiti, the fourth time in two years the mosque had been vandalized with hate speech. The local branch of the Rassemblement des Musulmans (Gathering of Muslims) filed a complaint. The graffiti included messages such as “Your coffins or your suitcases” and “France for the French.” Local authorities condemned the vandalism, and police increased patrols around the mosque.

According to a study released in February, 27 percent of 118 mosques surveyed had experienced at least one closure of a bank account, with difficulties in relations with banks and cash deposits identified as key issues. FORIF established a working group to address these problems, collaborating with the French Banking Federation to improve understanding between banks and Muslim associations. The study reported that to mitigate the problems, more mosques were adopting electronic payment methods and guides for banks and mosques were being developed to facilitate better financial management and compliance.

On February 21, the Lyon criminal court gave two former members of the far-right group Generation Identity, which was banned in 2021, a four-month suspended sentence and fined them 5,000 euros (\$5,500) for publicly inciting hatred against Kamel Kabtane, the administrator of the Lyon mosque. The court ruled they had falsely accused Kabtane of unauthorized prayer calls during the 2020 COVID lockdown and engaged in defamatory actions, including projecting defamatory visuals on the mosque and comparing Kabtane to a terrorist responsible for the 2015 attacks in Paris on social media. Kabtane, responding to the verdict, emphasized his commitment to national unity and criticized what he described as attacks on his dignity.

As of November 14, 1,325 requests for compensation had been sent to the Independent National Authority for Recognition and Reparation (INIRR), set up to adjudicate sex abuse claims involving the Catholic Church, since its establishment in January 2022. Approximately 450 cases resulted in a decision, 437 of which included financial compensation of up to €60,000 (\$66,000), according to a

periodic report published by the INIRR president. The establishment of the INIRR followed the 2021 release of the report on sexual abuse by the Catholic Church's independent commission, which found that priests had abused 216,000 minors in the country between 1950 and 2020, and that total abuse cases that included other Church employees could be as many as 330,000.

On April 18, the Angers prosecutor announced the arrest of a suspect in the March 30 and April 12 desecrations of churches in Trelaze and Angers. In both locations, the suspect was accused of decapitating statues and breaking off arms or faces as well as breaking crosses and ransacking a high altar. Minister of Interior Darmanin condemned the desecration and expressed his support to the Catholic community. The suspect was placed in psychiatric care.

In May, vandals defaced four Christian and two Jewish stelae in a cemetery in the Haute-Garonne town of Noe where Spanish Civil War refugees and Jews killed during World War II were buried. Minister of Interior Darmanin condemned "these acts of vandalism with the greatest firmness." A gendarmerie investigation remained in progress at year's end.

On October 10, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, and Orthodox leaders published a statement calling for peace and an end to violence in Israel and Gaza. They launched a call to prayer for Israeli and Palestinian civilians and hostages and urged French citizens to "preserve and cultivate the fraternal relationships that bind each other with respect and mutual attention; (to) firmly reject all antisemitism, all racism, all contempt or speech of hatred and death; (to) tirelessly seek truth and justice with a view to peace."

After the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel, an imam and a rabbi who had met for the first time at an interfaith lunch led an interfaith call to peace in Marseille on October 28 at the Notre de la Garde Basilica, in partnership with the city's Catholic archdiocese and its soccer club.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador, senior embassy officials, and other staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs engaged relevant government officials, including at the religious affairs offices of the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs and DILCRAH, on ways to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred and strengthen religious freedom. Topics discussed included religious tolerance, antisemitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, Holocaust-related compensation, and bilateral cooperation on these issues. Embassy officials closely monitored official government positions on antisemitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents.

Staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs met regularly in person with religious community leaders, activists, and private citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and to advocate tolerance for diversity. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and interfaith dialogue and tolerance with senior Christian, Muslim, and Jewish representatives, and with NGOs. They also hosted meetings with representatives from CRIF, the Israelite Central Consistory of France, the Paris Great Mosque, and Catholic and Protestant representatives working on interfaith dialogue.

On January 23, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith dinner for religious and community leaders and government officials involved in religious issues to commemorate National Religious Freedom Day, underscoring the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and the importance of unity and solidarity in the face of rising global religious hatred. The event also launched an initiative on the part of the embassy to highlight how religious tolerance can be a powerful tool for social inclusion.

On March 30, the embassy hosted an interfaith iftar that included an array of French Muslim leaders and foreign ambassadors and on April 4, the Ambassador hosted a Passover Seder with

Jewish leaders, leaders of other faiths, and members of parliament. On both occasions, the Ambassador delivered a message demonstrating U.S. support for religious freedom, diversity, and societal tolerance, and the guest lists reflected interfaith participants.

Senior officials from the embassy regularly attended religious celebrations and commemorations in the country, showcasing U.S. support for religious freedom. For example, a senior official attended the Great Synagogue's Remembrance Commemoration in September.

On January 17, the Consul General in Strasbourg made remarks at the European Parliament on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. During the event, she met with representatives of the European Jewish Association.

On May 4, the Consul General in Strasbourg met with the director of diplomacy for the World Jewish Congress, Leon Saltiel, and the group's newly appointed special envoy to the Council of Europe, Herbert Winter, to discuss possible collaboration at the Council of Europe.

In April, the American presence officer (APO) in Lyon attended an iftar at the Lyon Grand Mosque, meeting with religious leaders from around the region. With representatives of the Grand Synagogue of Lyon, reform Judaism, evangelical Christianity, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Lyon, the interfaith dinner was also attended by city and regional officials, all affirming the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in interfaith relations. In coordination with the embassy, APP Lyon helped create an exchange visitor program dedicated to Muslim community leaders. Part of the impetus for this program was feedback received from a meeting with the head of the Grand Mosque, who said that many of the imams in the area were being forced to leave the country based on French regulations, creating a potential lack of religious leadership.

On April 28, the consulate general in Marseille hosted an interfaith lunch to discuss religious freedom and ways to combat religious hatred and intolerance through interfaith dialogue. Religious leaders noted how rising hateful rhetoric incited growing hostility and discrimination towards minorities, contributing to rising anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiment in the Marseille area. Examples of interfaith sport events were mentioned as possible catalysts to promote bridges between youth from communities that had gradually grown apart from one another.

On May 6, representatives from the consulate general in Marseille met Oussama Arbai, director of the Le Pontet Mosque in the greater Avignon area, secretary to the Vaucluse Department Council of the Muslim Faith, and a local Muslim prison chaplain and discussed the importance of access to a nationwide and officially recognized curriculum for imams in France that promotes religious freedom and tolerance.

On September 20, representatives from the Consulate General in Marseille met with Father Mykola Hryvniak of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of Marseille and discussed religious freedom and community inclusivity, for the local Ukrainian refugee community.

On September 19, the Consul General in Strasbourg hosted an interfaith event for religious leaders that focused on ways to promote interfaith dialogue and opportunities for interfaith engagement in the next year.

On October 10, a senior embassy official and a representative from the Consulate in Rennes met with leaders of the Muslim, Jewish, and Protestant communities to discuss interfaith relations and concerns about world events in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attacks in Israel. On October 15, the APP in Rennes expressed support for the local Jewish community at a memorial service to commemorate victims of the October 7 attacks alongside local elected officials, government representatives, and representatives from other religious communities.

On October 24, the U.S. Consul General in Strasbourg met with Grand Rabbi Harold Weil, Maurice Dahan, the president of the Jewish Consistory of Strasbourg and the Lower Rhine, and Rabbi Mendel Samama, the representative of the Conference of European Rabbis, to express solidarity with the Jewish community in Strasbourg against antisemitism following the October 7 terrorist

attack in Israel. On October 30, the Consul General met with president of the Strasbourg Great Mosque Said Allaa to discuss tensions in the faith community in the wake of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

In September, staff from the APP in Lyon met with the director of the Maison d'Izieu, which had received a grant from the APP to document the role of the United States in the Nuremberg trials. The Maison d'Izieu was a school where 46 Jewish school children were taken by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps; it now serves as a memorial.

During an October 23-25 visit, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism met with Olivier Klein, the interministerial coordinator at DILCRAH, representatives of CRIF, and officials from the Consistoire (Central Consistory of France – the country's rabbinical council), as well as the Interior Minister and his diplomatic advisor. The discussions centered around the spike in antisemitic incidents in France, the insecurity felt by French Jews, and the development of strategies to combat online hate speech and discrimination in educational settings. Her visit also included meetings with the Council of Europe, emphasizing the need for international cooperation to address modern antisemitism effectively.

In November, the APO in Lyon met with the vice president of the **International League Against Racism** and Antisemitism to discuss the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict on the Jewish community in Lyon. Additionally, the APO met with a Jewish representative from the city government to discuss challenges and frustrations within the Jewish community, including tensions with the city government. In both meetings, participants made plans to increase collaboration and outreach related to religious freedom and tolerance in the year ahead.

On November 17, the Ambassador and the Consul General in Marseille visited the former Camp des Milles Internment and Deportation Camp and discussed with Director Alain Chouraqui the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and education to combat antisemitism and violent extremism related to religion.

On November 30, an embassy officer and representatives from the Consulate General in Marseille met with Alain Rajii, the deputy president of the Provence-Alpes-Cotes-d'Azur Region Regional Council of the Muslim Faith to discuss religious freedom, the Israel-Hamas conflict, anti-Muslim sentiment, and interfaith dialogue and youth engagement.

On December 1, an embassy officer and representatives from the consulate general in Marseille discussed the Israel-Hamas conflict, the rise of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, ways to address discrimination through interfaith dialogue, and youth engagement with the president of the Marseille-Provence branch of CRIF.

On December 15, the Consul General in Marseille met with Laurent Smolarek, Representative for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, who shared his concern as several members of his organization had been victims of physical violence in the region during the year.

The embassy regularly amplified messages from the Secretary of State and Department of State on religious freedom on embassy social media platforms in French and English. For example, in May and July, it posted remarks by the Secretary of State on religious freedom as a human right. The Ambassador also published messages related to religious holidays on her social media accounts to highlight religious diversity and high-level engagement on religious freedom issues, including posts on Yom Kippur, Easter, Ramadan, Nawruz, and Holi, among others. Following the October 7 Hamas attacks in Israel, the embassy issued a series of social media posts concerning religious tolerance and antisemitism, ranging from the Ambassador's participation in a march for solidarity with Israel to mashup videos of senior administration officials and several posts regarding the visit of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism. Alongside those social media postings, the embassy also organized two press briefings, one off-record and one on-record, with the Special Envoy to convey policy messages regarding religious tolerance and combating antisemitism to local journalists.

