



Turkey

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International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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There was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Nevertheless, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced some restrictions and occasional harassment, including detention for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. The Government continued to oppose "Islamic fundamentalism." Authorities continue their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in government facilities: including universities, schools, and workplaces.

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom in principle; however, a sharp debate continued over the country's definition of "secularism," the proper role of religion in society, and the potential influence of the country's small minority of Islamists. Christians, Baha'is, and some Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and more radical Islamist elements continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam to another religion sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors. Some members of non-Muslim religious groups claim that they have limited career prospects in government or military service, particularly as military officers, judges, or prosecutors.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 301,383 square miles, and its population is approximately 67.8 million. Approximately 99 percent of the population is officially Muslim, the majority of whom are Sunni. The actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower; the Government officially recognizes only three minority religious communities—Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—and counts the rest of the population as Muslim, although other non-Muslim communities exist. The level of religious observance varies throughout the country, in part due to the strong secularist approach of the Government. In addition to the country's Sunni Muslim majority, there are an estimated 5 to 12 million Alevis, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religions found in Anatolia as well. Alevi rituals include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Alevis and radical Sunnis maintain Alevis are not Muslims. In several areas of western Anatolia, there is also a small group of Muslims, sometimes referred to as Tahtacilar, some of whose practices include rituals with ancient Turkmen (shamanist) roots; some Sunni groups consider these practices to be un-Islamic.

There are several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 25,000 Jews, and less than 3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians. The Government interprets the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to these three groups. However, this does not extend to the religious

leadership organs; for example, the Ecumenical and Armenian Patriarchates continue to seek recognition of their legal status. There also are approximately 10,000 Baha'is, an estimated 15,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians, 5,000 Yezidis, 3,000 Protestants, and small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian, Chaldean, Nestorian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, and Maronite Christians. The number of Syriac Christians in the southeast was once high; however, under pressure from government authorities and later under the impact of the war against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) insurrection, many Syriacs migrated to Istanbul, Western Europe, or North America. Over the last several years, small numbers of Syriacs have returned from overseas to the southeast, mostly from Western Europe. In most return cases, older family members have returned while younger ones have remained abroad.

There are no known estimates of the number and religious affiliation of foreign missionaries in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on Muslim and other religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, usually for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." The Constitution establishes the country as a "secular state" and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. However, other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. The state bureaucracy has played the role of defending traditional Turkish secularism throughout the history of the Republic. In some cases, elements of the bureaucracy have opposed policies of the elected government on the grounds that they threatened the secular state.

The Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and education through its Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which reports directly to the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet has responsibility for regulating the operation of the country's 75,000 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants. Some groups, particularly Alevis, claim that the Diyanet reflects mainstream Sunni Islamic beliefs to the exclusion of other beliefs; however, the Government asserts that the Diyanet treats equally all who request services.

A separate government agency, the General Directorate for Foundations (Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu), regulates some activities of non-Muslim religious groups and their affiliated churches, monasteries, synagogues, and related religious property. There are 161 "minority foundations" recognized by the Vakiflar, including Greek Orthodox foundations with approximately 70 sites, Armenian Orthodox foundations with approximately 50 sites, and Jewish foundations with 20 sites, as well as Syrian Christian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The Vakiflar also regulates Muslim charitable religious foundations, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

Some religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost property to the Government in the past or continue to fight against such losses. Many such properties were lost because current laws allow the Vakiflar to assume direct administration of properties that fall into disuse when the size of the local non-Muslim community dwindles. Other properties that were held in the name of individual community members were expropriated after the community members emigrated or died without heirs.

In 2002, the Government adopted a reform measure allowing, in principle, non-Muslim foundations to acquire property for the first time since 1936. However, the measures are restricted to the 161 minority foundations recognized by the Vakiflar and to cases in which the foundations can demonstrate a renewed community need. A number of foundations criticized the application process as lengthy and burdensome. By the end of the period covered in this report, the vast majority of petitions to recover properties expropriated by the State had been rejected or deferred due to what authorities asserted was a lack of documentation. In June, representatives of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Turkey met Prime Minister Erdogan to discuss difficulties with property ownership and other longstanding problems facing non-Muslim communities.

Government authorities do not interfere in matters of doctrine pertaining to non-Muslim religions, nor do they restrict the publication or use of religious literature among members of the religion.

There are legal restrictions against insulting any religion recognized by the Government, interfering with that religion's services, or debasing its property. However, some Christian churches have been defaced, including in the Tur Abdin area of the southeast where many ancient Syriac churches are found, and communities often have been unable to make repairs due to lack of resources. During the period covered by this report, Syriac Christians in Mardin Province were able to begin restoration projects on some churches.

Alevis freely practice their beliefs and build "Cem houses" (places of gathering). Many Alevis allege discrimination in the Government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools, which reflect Sunni Muslim doctrines. They also charge a bias in the Diyanet, which views Alevis as a cultural rather than religious group; the Diyanet does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. During a September visit to Germany, Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters that "Alevism is not a religion" and said Alevi Cem houses are "culture houses" rather than "temples."

The Caferis, Turkey's principal Shi'a community numbering between 500,000 and 1 million (concentrated mostly in eastern Turkey and Istanbul), do not face restrictions on their religious freedoms. They are free to build and operate their own mosques and to appoint their own imams; however, like the Alevis, the Diyanet does not allocate funds for this purpose. The Caferis claim to have faced discrimination and repression in the past, but such incidents reportedly have been rare in recent years.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

"Secularists" in the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to wage campaigns against what they label as proponents of "Islamic fundamentalism." These groups view "religious fundamentalism," which they do not define clearly, but which they assert is an attempt to impose the rule of Shari'a law in all civil and criminal matters, as a threat to the "secular State." The National Security Council (NSC), a military and civilian body established by the 1982 Constitution to advise senior leadership on national security matters, categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety.

According to the human rights organization Mazlum-Der and other groups, some government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of "anti-state" or "Islamist" activities. Additionally, reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicate that the military regularly dismisses religiously observant Muslims from the service. Allegedly such dismissals are based on behavior that the military believes identifies these individuals as "Islamic fundamentalists," which they fear indicates disloyalty to the secular State. According to Mazlum-Der, the military has charged individuals with "lack of discipline" for activities that include performing Muslim prayers or being married to women who wear headscarves.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats) have been banned officially since the mid-1920s. The military ranks tarikats among the most harmful threats to "secularism"; however, tarikats remain active and widespread. The NSC has called for stricter enforcement of the ban as part of its campaign against the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, some prominent political and social leaders continue to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Islamic communities.

Under the law, religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandate that only the Government can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it may not be eligible for a designated site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that do not own property recognized by the Vakiflar, often take place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. Police occasionally bar Christians from holding services in private apartments, and prosecutors sometimes open cases against Christians for holding unauthorized gatherings.

In May a Diyarbakir court acquitted Ahmet Guvener, pastor of the Diyarbakir Evangelical Church, in the opening hearing of his trial on multiple charges of operating an "illegal" church. The prosecutor told the court that Guvener's actions no longer constituted a crime due to international law and recent Turkish legal reforms. The church has faced repeated, arbitrary legal challenges, including many relating to zoning regulations, by the Government since its 1994 opening. In May, a local board charged with protecting cultural and historic sites rejected an application by the church to have its property zoned as a place of worship. The board stated that the church did not meet zoning regulations requiring that places of worship be situated on at least 2,500 square meters of property. Church members maintained that only one of 175 mosques in Diyarbakir met that standard.

An 2001 circular from the Ministry of Interior encouraged some provincial governors to use existing laws, such as those regulating meetings, religious building zoning, and education, to regulate gatherings of "Protestants, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, Believers in Christ" within their provinces, while "bearing in mind" those provisions of the law that provide for freedom of religion. According to one Protestant group, as well as reports by the media and other observers, local authorities asked more than a dozen churches in Istanbul and elsewhere to close. Other churches experienced increased police harassment following the publication of the circular. Several Protestant groups that have engaged in religious activities, including worship, Bible study, and religious education, had charges filed against them for zoning violations.

The authorities continue to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally do not interfere with their activities. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as head of the country's Greek Orthodox community; however, the Government does not interfere with his travels or other ecumenical activities. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continues to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary has been closed since 1971, when the State nationalized all private institutions of higher learning. Under existing restrictions, religious communities other than Sunni Muslims cannot legally train new clergy in the country for eventual leadership. Coreligionists from outside the country have been permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including Patriarchs and Chief Rabbis, must be citizens.

In February, the Vakiflar expropriated an orphanage on the Prince's Islands that had belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, asserting that it was unused and had fallen into disrepair. Patriarchate representatives note, however, that they had been willing to repair the historically significant property but had refused to do so while their legal ownership was being challenged. Also, by the end of the period covered in this report, the Patriarchate was unable to receive permission to repair churches, including one damaged in the 1999 earthquake and another in the terrorist bombings carried out in Istanbul in November 2003.

In March, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I appointed six non-Turkish citizen metropolitans to the church's Holy Synod, representing the first time in the 80-year history of the Republic of Turkey that noncitizens had been appointed to the body. Although the Synod has met four times since these appointments, at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was still conducting a legal analysis of the unprecedented move.

No law explicitly prohibits proselytizing or religious conversions; however, many prosecutors and police regard proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion, especially when such activities are deemed to have political overtones. Police occasionally bar Christians from handing out religious literature and sometimes arrest proselytizers for disturbing the peace, "insulting Islam," conducting unauthorized educational courses, or distributing literature that has criminal or separatist elements. Courts usually dismiss such charges. Proselytizing is often considered socially unacceptable; Christians performing missionary work are sometimes beaten and insulted. If the proselytizers are foreigners, they may be deported, but generally they are able to reenter the country. Police officers may report students who meet with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

In October, three members of the Nationalist Movement Party in Bursa Province were charged with severely beating Yakup Cindilli, a convert to Christianity, for distributing copies of The New Testaments. Cindilli was in a coma for 40 days after the attack. In March, the court trying the case postponed hearings for 15 months on the grounds that such a period of time was needed before a medical evaluation could be conducted to determine the full extent of Cindilli's injuries.

Authorities continued to enforce a long-term ban on the wearing of headscarves at universities and by civil servants in public buildings. Women who wear headscarves and persons who actively show support for those who defy the ban have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers. Students who wear head coverings are not permitted to register for classes. Many secular Turkish women accuse Islamists of using advocacy for wearing the headscarf as a political tool and say they fear that efforts to remove the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering. In October 2003, Istanbul University prevented a visiting foreign professor from entering the campus for a conference because she was wearing a headscarf. Also in October 2003, President Sezer excluded the covered wives of government ministers and Members of Parliament from the guest list for the traditional presidential Republic Day reception.

In November 2003, a judge in Ankara ordered a defendant out of the courtroom because she was wearing a headscarf. Opponents of the headscarf ban staged a number of nonviolent protests against the policy during the period covered by this report.

In June, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg ruled that Turkish universities have the right to ban Muslim headscarves.

A 1997 law made 8 years of secular education compulsory. After completing the 8 years, students may pursue study at imam hatip (Islamic preacher) high schools. Imam hatip schools are classified as vocational, and graduates of vocational schools face an automatic reduction in their university entrance exam grades if they apply for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction effectively bars imam hatip graduates from enrolling in university programs other than theology. Many pious Turks criticize the religious instruction provided in the regular schools as inadequate. Most families that enroll their children in imam hatip schools do so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams. In May, President Sezer vetoed a bill that would have eliminated the disadvantage faced by graduates of imam hatip schools (and other vocational schools) seeking to enroll in the full range of university social sciences programs. Sezer stated that the bill violated the "principles of secularism." Prime Minister Erdogan criticized the President for "preventing equal opportunity in education."

Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religion courses outside of school, although clandestine private courses do exist. Students who complete 5 years of primary school may enroll in Diyanet Koran classes on weekends and during summer vacation. Many Koran courses function unofficially. Unlike in past years, police and Jandarma did not close any unauthorized Koran courses during the period covered by this report. Only children 12 and older legally may register for official Koran courses, and Mazlum-Der reports that police often raid illegal courses for younger children.

The 1923 Lausanne Treaty exempts religious minorities—which the State interprets as referring to Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—from Islamic religious and moral instruction in the public schools upon written notification of their non-Muslim background. These students may attend Muslim religious courses with parental consent. Others, such as Catholics, Protestants, and Syriac Christians, are not exempted legally; however, in practice they may obtain exemptions. The minorities recognized under the Lausanne Treaty are permitted to operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The curriculum of these schools includes Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish instruction. There have been reports that authorities have refused to allow children to attend minority schools in cases where one parent is Muslim and the other is not Muslim.

In April 2003, an appeals court upheld a ruling allowing the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate to retain control of an Armenian Orthodox Church in Kirikhan, Hatay Province. Church officials in May 2003 formed a foundation to take charge of the property. Authorities had sought to expropriate the church because the local Armenian Orthodox community had dwindled in numbers.

In December 2003, local authorities in Edirne rescinded a longstanding order to expropriate a sacred site of the Baha'i community. At the end of the period covered in this report, members of the Baha'i community were seeking authorization to renovate the property from a local board responsible for protection of cultural and national wealth.

In April 2003, Mersin police arrested 12 members of Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly holding an illegal meeting in a private home after being notified in 2002 that they would no longer be allowed to use a rented Kingdom Hall due to zoning laws. When the group planned in May 2003 to hold services in an old Kingdom Hall, police reportedly threatened to close down the Hall if it was used, then attended the next 17 meetings at the Hall, taking notes. In September, a court acquitted the 12 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mersin and Istanbul were fined for conducting religious meetings without permission.

Restoration or construction may be carried out in buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board on the protection of cultural and national wealth. Bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation in the past have impeded repairs to religious facilities, especially in the case of Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox properties. Authorities in Mardin and Simak provinces reportedly denied permission to restore historic Syrian Orthodox churches and buildings on zoning grounds. Groups are prohibited from using funds from their properties in one part of the country to support their existing population in another part of the country.

Although religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards, there is officially no discrimination based upon religious persuasion. Some religious groups, such as the Baha'i, allege that they are not permitted to state their religion on their cards because their religion is not included among the options; they have made their concerns known to the Government. There were reports that authorities have become more flexible regarding the types of religious affiliation that can be listed on the cards. Conversion to another religion entails amending one's identification card; there are reports that those who convert from Islam to another religion have been subject to harassment by local officials when they seek amendment of their cards. Some who are not Muslim maintain that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposes them to discrimination and harassment.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported increasing official harassment over meeting for worship due to the fact that they are not members of an officially recognized religion. Members also have reported some difficulties in claiming conscientious objector status and exemption from required military service. Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscripted into the military refuse to take the military oath or carry weapons and have faced arrest and detention as a result; generally the detention lasts for about a month, after which the individual is released pending trial.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Christian groups sometimes encounter difficulty in organizing. The authorities periodically detain Turkish and foreign Christians on charges of holding unauthorized gatherings.

In June 2003, an Istanbul court acquitted 13 Ahmadi Muslims, members of a small religious community, who had been arrested in 2002 and charged under Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law for involvement with an organization "with terrorist aims." The case was under appeal at the end of the period covered in this report.

During 2003, Bulent Bozdogan, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, was reportedly tried on two separate occasions and sentenced to a total of 3 months in military prison on charges related to his refusal to serve in the military. During the period, he was reportedly beaten and mistreated numerous times.

Members of a Protestant church in Kecioren, Ankara, claimed local residents opposed to their presence repeatedly threatened them, attempted to attack church members, and vandalized the church. They said police were dismissive of their reports; church members filed a complaint against the local police chief. In September 2003, church members opened a case against the alleged organizer of the harassment; however, the suspect remained at large and the threats and vandalism continued.

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.

Abuses By Terrorist Organizations

In November, simultaneous suicide terrorist attacks against two of Istanbul's major synagogues killed 23 and wounded over 300, including many passersby. Five days later, similar attacks against the British Consulate and the HSBC bank Istanbul headquarters also took place in Istanbul. Reports of the ongoing investigation suggest that the bombers and accomplices may have had assistance and support from al-Qa'ida.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June 2003, Parliament approved an amendment to the Act on Construction replacing the word "mosques" with "houses of worship," in theory removing a legal obstacle to the establishment of non-Muslim religious facilities. The law gives local officials the authority to determine whether there is a need for such a place of worship in the community. Members of Christian groups reported that local authorities often rejected applications or failed to designate zones where religious facilities could be constructed. In some cases authorities have used the measure to challenge the legality of existing places of worship of communities that are not Muslim. Members of Christian groups said their applications to build new churches or have existing churches re-zoned as places of worship were sometimes rejected because their churches failed to meet regulations requiring places of worship to be situated on at least 2,500 square meters of property, even though most local mosques failed to meet that standard. In December 2003, the Interior Ministry issued a circular summarizing the legal amendments and directing provincial governors to "facilitate" efforts by religious communities to open places of worship.

In January, the Government abolished the Minorities Subcommittee, established by secret regulation in 1962 to monitor minorities as potential threats to the country, and replaced it with the Board to Assess Problems of Minorities. (The new board regulation was also secret, though it was leaked to the press.) Unlike the Subcommittee, the new board does not include representatives from military and intelligence agencies. According to the Government, the board will work to support the rights of non-Muslims.

In March, authorities approved an application by a group of German-speaking Christians to establish a religious/charity association in Alanya, Antalya Province. In the past, authorities have routinely rejected such applications on the grounds that the Act on Associations prohibits associations based on religion.

Members of the Christian community reported that the Government revised school textbooks in response to complaints about inaccurate, negative references to Christianity. They said the revised versions represent a significant improvement.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Government policy and the officially tolerant relationship among religions in society contribute to religious freedom; however, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is face societal suspicion and mistrust. Jews and Christians from most denominations freely practice their religions and report little discrimination in daily life. However, there were regular reports that citizens who convert from Islam to another religion often experience some form of social harassment or pressure from family and neighbors. Proselytizing on behalf of non-Muslim religions is socially unacceptable and sometimes dangerous. A variety of newspapers and television shows have published anti-Christian messages. In April, an Ankara State Security Court sentenced Kerim Akbas of Baskent TV to 23 months' imprisonment for inciting attacks against local Protestants and their places of worship. The court convicted Akbas for a series of broadcasts claiming Protestants were bribing Muslims to convert and attempting to disturb the peace. The ruling was under appeal at the end of the period covered by this report. Following the broadcasts, vandals damaged several local Protestant facilities.

In March, two bombers attacked an Istanbul Masonic Lodge, killing two and wounding seven. Turks widely believe that Masons in Turkey have Zionist and anti-Islamic tendencies. Evidence gathered in the subsequent investigation suggests that anti-Semitism was at least a partial motivating factor in the attack. According to press reports, one of the suspects later arrested also confessed to the August 2003 murder of a Jewish dentist in Istanbul. Reports also suggest that the perpetrator of this hate crime used his victim's address book and subsequently

telephoned a number of Jewish board members of an Istanbul retirement home and threatened them with violence.

Many non-Muslim religious group members, along with many in the secular political majority of Muslims, fear the possibility of Islamic extremism and the involvement of even moderate Islam in politics. Several Islamist newspapers regularly publish anti-Semitic material.

Iftar dinners, evening events tied to the daily breaking of the Ramadan fast, often involve invitations to religious and secular leaders of various faiths. Iftars hosted by diplomats, as well as business and religious leaders, may include invitations to people of other faiths as a sign of openness and hospitality.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other Mission officials, including staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul and the U.S. Consulate in Adana, enjoy close relations with the Muslim majority and other religious groups. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to enable the reopening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island. In February, the Archons of the Order of St. Andrew, an American group that actively supports the Ecumenical Patriarchate, visited Istanbul and Ankara with the support of the Mission. The Ambassador accompanied the Archons to meetings with Cabinet members to encourage an agreement on the reopening of Halki.

In June, President Bush met with President Sezer and discussed the importance of maintaining the tradition of religious freedom. President Bush acknowledged the country's religious diversity and stressed the importance of maintaining it.

The Ambassador discussed religious freedom regularly in private meetings with Cabinet members. These discussions touched on both government policy regarding Islam and other religions, and specific cases of alleged religious discrimination. Other Embassy officers held similar meetings with government officials. The Ambassador held an Iftar dinner with government officials and others. Diplomats from the Embassy and Consulates also hosted Iftar dinners and met regularly with representatives of the various religious groups. These meetings covered a range of topics, including the Baha'i property in Edirne, the beating of Christian convert Yakup Cindilli, problems faced by non-Muslim groups, and the debate over the role of Islam in the country.

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious freedom for Muslims and religious minorities with the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Washington. In March, an official from the Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to the country to meet with Diyanet officials and representatives of Muslim and Christian communities.

Representatives from the Embassy and Adana Consulate attended trials involving religious issues, including the above-mentioned trials of Diyarbakir Pastor Ahmet Guvener and the alleged organizer of the harassment of the Protestant church in Kecioren, Ankara.

The Mission utilizes the International Visitor Program to introduce professionals in various fields to the United States and American counterparts. Religious issues are included among these programs.

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