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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Israel and the occupied territories

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
July 30, 2012

[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

A report on the Occupied Territories (including areas subject to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority) is appended at the end of this report.

The country's laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty protects religious freedom through reference to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which describes the country as a Jewish state with full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation, and promises freedom of religion. While there is no constitution, government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Some individuals and groups were responsible for discriminatory practices against Israeli-Arab Muslims, Christians, and non-Orthodox Jews. Relations among religious and ethnic groups – between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism – were strained.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials maintained a dialogue with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on human and civil rights, including religious freedom, and encouraged religious leaders to advance regional peace and calm local tensions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a population of 7.8 million (including settlers living in the Occupied Territories), of which 5.8 million are Jews; 1.6 million are Muslims and Christians; and 322,000 are classified as "other" – mostly persons from the former Soviet Union who immigrated under the Law of Return but did not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition used by the government for civil procedures, although many identify themselves as Jewish.

According to the 2009 report of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 8 percent of the Jewish population is Haredi (also known as "ultra-Orthodox"); 12 percent identify themselves as Orthodox; 13 percent describe themselves as "traditional, religious;" 25 percent say they are "traditional, not so religious;" and 42 percent describe themselves as "nonreligious/secular" Jews, most of whom observed some Jewish traditions. About 30 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside the country. Over 15,000 traditional and secular Jews associated themselves with the Conservative (Masorti) or Reform streams of Judaism, while a few held Reconstructionist beliefs. There is a small but growing community of approximately 20,000 Messianic Jews. Slightly more than 20 percent of the population are non-Jews, primarily ethnic

Arabs. Of the country's total population, Muslims (nearly all Sunnis) constitute 16.6 percent; Christians 1.6 percent; Druze 1.6 percent; and other religious groups collectively constitute approximately 0.5 percent, including relatively small communities of Samaritans, Karaites, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'is.

Religious communities often are concentrated in geographical areas according to religious beliefs. The country continues to undergo demographic change owing to the higher birth rates of the Haredi community.

During the year, there were nearly 90,000 foreigners permitted to work in the country and an estimated 118,000 illegal foreign workers residing in the country. Foreign workers were members of many different religious groups, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

While there is no formal constitution, laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty protects religious freedom. The Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state" and references the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which promises religious freedom and full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation.

Numerous Supreme Court rulings also incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including their religious freedom provisions, into the country's body of law. Matters of personal status, however, are partly governed by the religious laws of the parties concerned, and to the extent that such law is inconsistent with the country's obligations under the ICCPR, the government reserves the right to apply that law. Government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion, although governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued, and some laws and policies promoted certain Orthodox Jewish values over those of other religious beliefs.

Israel inherited a preexisting body of law from the British Mandate (1920 to 1948) and Ottoman (1517 to 1917) periods, which remains the law, apart from the sections specifically abrogated by the Knesset's (parliament) subsequent legislation. The existence of the Sharia (Islamic law) courts is a continuation from the late Ottoman period, when their jurisdiction was confined to issues of personal status, succession, and administration of waqfs (religious endowments). The institution of the Chief Rabbinate as the supreme authority on Halacha (Jewish law) and personal status issues also has continued since the Ottoman "millet" system, which made hierarchical religious authorities responsible for every individual within the empire. The jurisdiction of each religious community over its own adherents' personal status issues continued through the provisions of the 1922 British Mandate that remain the applicable law today.

The law recognizes the following "religious communities": Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, Druze, Evangelical Episcopal, and Baha'i. The fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community is a vestige of the Ottoman period when Islam was the dominant religion, but this has not limited Muslims from practicing their religion. A collection of arrangements with various government agencies defines the status of several Christian denominations with representation in the country. The government allows members of unrecognized religious groups to practice their religious beliefs, but their personal status issues, including marriage, must be handled by an authority within one of the recognized communities, although the government does accept marriage registrations from the Karaites and the head of the Evangelical Alliance of Israel (formerly the United Christian Council in Israel), an umbrella organization for many Protestant churches in the country.

Major Protestant denominations that have been in the country for many years, such as the Assemblies of God, Baptists, and Lutherans, among others, are not recognized. Four religious communities that have applied for official recognition have had their applications pending for years: Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Alliance of Israel. Jehovah's Witnesses presented two applications for recognition as a religious congregation, in 2003 and 2008, which were rejected.

Under the Law of Return, the government grants immigration and residence rights to individuals who meet established criteria defining Jewish identity and also to certain family members. Eligible family members include a child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew. The Law of Return established the right for every Jew to immigrate. Both physical descendants and religious converts have been excluded at times, however, based solely on the potential immigrant's religious belief.

Those born to Israeli Jews remain citizens according to the state, regardless of their religious belief or Orthodox recognition, while non-Israeli Jewish descendants are routinely asked religious questions to determine whether they qualified to become a citizen. The question of whether one believes Jesus is the Jewish Messiah has been used to determine whether a Jew was qualified to immigrate. The Supreme Court repeatedly has upheld the right, however, of

Israeli Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah to retain their citizenship. The immigration exclusion was routinely applied only against Messianic Jews, whereas Jews who were atheists were accepted, and Jews who chose to believe in other religions, including Hindus and Buddhists, were not screened out.

Non-Orthodox converts to Judaism are entitled to the civil right of return, citizenship, and registration as Jews in the civil population registry. These individuals are not able to marry in the country, as they do not meet Orthodox standards. Ethiopian Jews, who traditionally practice some rituals that are different from those in Halacha, also have some difficulty getting their marriages and divorces registered due to Orthodox standards, although some Orthodox rabbis have registered their marriages.

While recognized religious communities only require visa approvals through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), unrecognized religious communities' visas must be approved additionally through the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to justify stays longer than five years.

Each officially recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial, limiting the freedom of many individuals who may not otherwise subject themselves to the authority of those religious communities, although there are some exceptions. The Sharia courts have exclusive jurisdiction in matters of personal status concerning Muslims, although women may turn instead to civil family courts for divorces. Local tribunals do not exercise jurisdiction over personal status issues of nonrecognized religious groups. In general only recognized religious communities receive government funding for their religious services, although there are some exceptions, including for Samaritans and Karaites.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but by mutual agreement parties may file such cases in religious courts instead. The rabbinical courts, when exercising these powers in civil matters, apply religious law, which varies from civil law, including in matters relating to the property rights of widows and daughters. Family status matters are normally the purview of religious courts, but Jewish, Druze, and Christian families may ask for some cases, such as those concerning alimony and child custody in divorces, to be adjudicated in civil courts. Women often prefer the civil courts, as they are viewed to be more favorable to them, but are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the religious court if the spouse filed the divorce case there first. Since 2001 Muslims also have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce to civil courts. In practice Muslims rarely choose this option and there are many social pressures preventing Muslim women from taking this route to civil courts, where the case often is adjudicated in Hebrew by a Jewish judge. Paternity cases among Muslim citizens are the exclusive jurisdiction of Islamic law courts.

No religious group possesses legal jurisdiction over financial disputes.

The High Rabbinical Court restricted some individuals' conversions to Judaism. Following Supreme Court rulings since 2002, the government registers certificates of conversion to Judaism performed in the country and abroad by Reform and Conservative rabbis. However, a petition is pending in a Supreme Court decision regarding the entitlement of such converts in the country to the rights granted under the Law of Return. Converts from abroad usually enjoyed those rights, but the MOI has added extra requirements, including a year's active participation in the Jewish community where the conversion took place, as prerequisites for immigration. The Interior Ministry's reliance on the Chief Rabbinate's disapproval of some conversions performed by certain Orthodox rabbis in the United States remained a problem, and several such cases were still before the Supreme Court. However, at midyear the government agreed that the MOI would henceforth rely on the Jewish Agency rather than the Chief Rabbinate regarding Orthodox conversions from abroad.

Since personal status matters for Jews are controlled by the Chief Rabbinate, which does not recognize non-Orthodox converts to Judaism as Jews, Reform and Conservative converts in the country cannot marry or divorce in the country and cannot be buried in Jewish cemeteries; people who converted to Reform or Conservative Judaism abroad do not have any such restrictions in the country.

The government provides funds for Orthodox conversion programs but does not provide support for non-Orthodox programs. The government had not taken any steps by year's end to implement the May 2009 High Court of Justice ruling that the government must cease discriminating against non-Orthodox conversions. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sponsored Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers converted to non-Orthodox (and therefore unrecognized) traditions and for soldiers not recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox rabbinical authorities. Residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except for children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete.

Although not officially recognized for purposes of civil and personal status matters, groups composed of adherents of Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism received a small amount of government funding and were recognized by the courts.

The government implements some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example the only in-country Jewish marriages the government recognizes are those performed by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate, which excludes citizens without maternal Jewish lineage since such persons are not considered Jewish according to Halacha. The government does not allow civil marriages, such as secular ceremonies performed by state or municipal authorities, or marriages performed by non-Orthodox rabbis. Civil marriages, non-

Orthodox marriages of Jews, or interfaith marriages must take place abroad to be recognized by the government. As a result, several hundred thousand citizens cannot marry within their own country due to either a lack of eligibility or their desire to wed outside of the rabbinic system. Jews who married in civil ceremonies or in non-Orthodox ceremonies performed abroad are able to divorce only via rabbinical courts that operated according to Halacha, or through courts abroad.

In order to marry in government-recognized ceremonies, Jews have to undergo marriage counseling administered by Orthodox religious authorities. As part of this counseling, all Jews – including the secular majority and those who practice Reform or Conservative Judaism – are taught to respect traditional Orthodox family roles.

A law passed in 2010 allows for the civil registration of couples within the country only if both partners are recognized as being "of no religion." No person registered with the state as Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or Druze can choose to be married in a civil ceremony or marry someone "of no religion" within the country. The law does not permit persons of different faiths to marry each other within the country, so these couples must seek marriage abroad to be recognized as married by the state.

The Chief Rabbinate also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered Jewish by Orthodox standards. This exclusion of persons who consider themselves Jewish, usually descendants of Jewish fathers but not Jewish mothers, has led to public criticism, especially during national tragedies, such as the December 2010 burial of a Carmel fire victim at a military cemetery. The mourning mother firmly objected, but eventually acquiesced to the Chief Rabbinate's decision to bury her daughter in the non-Jewish section. Although Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin set a precedent in 1993 when he reversed the Chief Rabbinate's decision to bury a soldier killed by Hamas outside the Jewish section of the military cemetery, no other government leader has overruled the Chief Rabbinate regarding Jewish burials.

Members of unrecognized religious groups also faced difficulties in obtaining marriage certifications and burial services.

Proselytizing is legal in the country and missionaries of all religious groups are allowed to proselytize all citizens. A 1977 law prohibits any person from offering material benefits as an inducement to conversion. It is also illegal to perform a conversion ceremony for persons under 18 years of age unless one parent is an adherent of the religious group seeking to convert the minor. Despite the legality of proselytism, the government has taken a number of steps that discouraged proselytizing and encouraged the popular perception that it is illegal.

The MOI has cited proselytism as a reason to deny student, work, and religious visa extensions, as well as to deny permanent residency petitions. Following protests from the Orthodox community, in 1986 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) promised the Knesset that it would voluntarily refrain from all proselytism in conjunction with receiving a building permit for its Jerusalem Center.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law safeguards the holy sites of all religious groups, including in Jerusalem. All holy sites enjoy certain protections under the penal law, which makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site, while historic sites are protected by the antiquities law. The government provided resources for the upkeep of holy places of all recognized religious communities, but provided significantly greater levels of government resources to Jewish holy places.

A government policy since 1967, repeatedly upheld by the Supreme Court and routinely enforced by the police citing security concerns, denies all non-Muslims opportunities to worship at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. While the government ensured limited access to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif to everyone regardless of religious beliefs, only Muslims are allowed to pray at the site, although their access has been occasionally restricted due to security concerns. Police regulated traffic in and out of the compound and removed non-Muslim visitors if they appeared to be praying. Since 2000 the Jordanian Waqf that manages the site has restricted non-Muslims from entering the Dome of the Rock shrine and Al-Aqsa Mosque. Non-Muslim religious symbols are not allowed to be worn on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

Government authorities prohibit mixed-gender prayer services at Jewish religious sites maintained by the Chief Rabbinate in deference to the belief of most Orthodox Jews that such services violate the precepts of Judaism. At the Western Wall, men and women must use separate areas to visit and pray. According to a policy repeatedly upheld by the Supreme Court, women are not allowed to conduct prayers at the Western Wall while wearing prayer shawls and are not permitted to read from Torah scrolls because this form of prayer by women violates Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law. There is a separate prayer area along the Western Wall, south of the Mughrabi Gate where women may read the Torah and pray wearing prayer shawls.

The signs posted around the Western Wall plaza requesting gender segregation throughout the plaza, rather than just at the prayer areas, were removed in 2010. Official "modesty patrols" occasionally attempted to enforce gender separation and guarded the path designated for "men only" that was installed in 2009 opposite the Western Wall. According to the government-appointed Rabbi of the Western Wall, the path was created for those who asked to be able to get to the Western Wall plaza without having to walk through a mixed-gender area.

According to the NGO Hiddush-Religious Freedom and Equality, the country financially supported over 100,000 yeshiva (religious studies) students over the age of 18. In late 2010 an interministerial team recommended that yeshiva students meet specific requirements to receive subsidies.

By law the government subsidizes 55 to 75 percent of the expenses incurred by Haredi religious schools as long as they teach an equivalent percentage of the national curriculum, which includes non-religious subjects. However, another law exempts these schools from that requirement.

Government resources available for religious/heritage studies to Arab and non-Orthodox Jewish public schools are significantly less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. Public and private Arab schools offer studies in both Islam and Christianity, but state funding for such studies is proportionately less than the funding for religious education courses in Jewish schools.

Public Hebrew-language secular schools teach Jewish history and religious texts. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture rather than religious belief. Public Arabic-speaking schools with Arab student bodies teach mandatory classes on the Qur'an and the Bible, since both Muslim and Christian Arabs attend these schools. Orthodox Jewish religious schools that are part of the public school system teach mandatory religion classes, as do independent ultra-Orthodox schools that receive significant state funding. A few independent mixed Jewish-Arab schools also exist and offer religion classes.

The government employs civilian non-Jewish clergy as chaplains at military burials when a non-Jewish soldier dies in service. The MOI provides imams to conduct funerals according to Muslim customs. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF are Orthodox.

Military service is compulsory for Jews, Druze, and the 5,000-member Circassian community (Muslims from the northwestern Caucasus region who immigrated to various points in the Ottoman-controlled Middle East in the late 19th century). Government policy, formalized and conditioned by the 2002 Tal Law, allows Haredi Jews to refuse to serve based on religious reasons. Arab citizens are exempted from compulsory service. The majority of Arab citizens choose not to serve in the military; however, some Christian and Muslim citizens, including many Bedouin, voluntarily enlist. In lieu of military service, Arab citizens and Haredi Jews can perform national service for one to two years, including for NGOs focused on improving their own communities as volunteers in the health, education, and welfare sectors. This voluntary national service confers eligibility for national benefits similar to those accorded military veterans.

All recognized religious communities are exempt from taxation for places of worship, according to the annually drafted Arrangements Law. However, in March 2010 the Knesset passed an amendment to the municipal and property tax law, which also grants synagogues exclusively a 100 percent exemption from municipal property taxes. Several social justice and civil rights organizations, including the legal defense NGO Jerusalem Institute of Justice (JIJ), submitted a petition to the High Court during the year requesting either an injunction to order local authorities to interpret the law as applying to all places of worship or a court instruction to the Knesset to amend the law by including other religious groups' properties in the additional tax exemption.

The 1993 Fundamental Agreement ratified by the Knesset in 1994 established relations between the Holy See and the government. The subsequent 18-year-long economic negotiations between the government and the Holy See continued at year's end. These negotiations addressed property rights and tax exemptions for Roman Catholic institutions and their access to Israeli courts.

The MOI has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups, while the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of non-Jewish holy sites. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has jurisdiction over the country's 133 Jewish religious councils, which oversee the provision of religious services for Jewish communities. The MOI's Department of Non-Jewish Affairs oversees one non-Jewish religious council for the Druze. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. The government financed approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local municipalities funded the remainder.

The government funded the construction of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries. According to the government, while the state budget does not cover the costs of construction for non-Jewish places of worship, it provides some assistance for their maintenance, although at a disproportionately lower level than for synagogues.

The approximately 60,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages were unable to build or legally maintain mosques as a result of longstanding government policy to deny ownership claims, building requests, and municipal services in unrecognized, illegally established Bedouin communities. Mosques existed in unrecognized Bedouin communities, but, as with homes and other community structures, the government considered them illegal and therefore subject to demolition.

In October 2008, the High Court ruled that the Simon Wiesenthal Center could continue construction at a site in Jerusalem despite the objections of several Muslim organizations, which argued that it was located on part of the Mamilla Cemetery. Supporters of the U.S.-based center had cited an 1894 ruling by the Islamic Law court, which stated that the cemetery was no longer sacred because it was abandoned. The High Court explained in its ruling that the construction site had served as a municipal parking lot for almost 50 years without a single complaint leveled against such use, and Islamic authorities in 1929 had allowed construction in other parts of the abandoned cemetery. Some Islamic groups continued to object to the project on religious grounds during the year.

Identification cards issued before 2007 distinguished between Jews and non-Jews by the differing dates printed on identification cards using either the Gregorian calendar with roman numerals for non-Jews or the Hebrew calendar with Hebrew numerals for Jewish citizens. Documents issued after 2007 carry both dates.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot. Jewish holidays and the Sabbath are officially established as days of rest, and non-Jews have the right to observe their own Sabbath and holidays as days of rest from work. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays. The law prohibits employers from refusing to hire or from firing employees who observed a different day of rest for religious observance, and employers cannot according to the law make working on a rest day a condition of employment. The Ministry of Labor and Social Services issued permits for exceptions enabling essential workers to work on their days of rest. The law gives municipalities the authority to order the opening or closing of businesses on the Sabbath.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious detainees. Some tourists were temporarily detained for religious reasons at Ben-Gurion Airport, prevented from entering the country, and sent back to their countries of origin because of the MOI's "suspicions of missionary activity," as explained to them by the border control officials at the airport. There are no clearly publicized regulations as to how the MOI places a person on the watch list or on what grounds, but the questioning of such individuals often relates to their religious beliefs.

The MOI continued to collect data on alleged missionaries from antimissionary groups like Yad L'Achim and used it to deny entry to the country to foreign individuals. According to a July 3 *Ma'ariv* article, a Jerusalem district court judge overturned a 2010 MOI decision to deny a foreign pastor a clergy visa and deport him from the country due to an NGO's allegations of missionary activity. In his ruling the judge chided the MOI for adopting an illegal procedure and relying on hearsay from religious informants and instructed the MOI to limit its enforcement actions to those strictly in accordance with the law.

The government selectively enforced legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom. Government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although government discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued. For example the government continued to discriminate against non-Orthodox Jewish citizens through some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. A minority of Jews in the country observes the Orthodox tradition, and the majority of Jewish citizens objected to exclusive Orthodox control over fundamental aspects of their personal lives.

During the year there were several cases of Orthodox converts from the United States not being recognized in the country as Jews because the MOI relied on the Chief Rabbinate's disapproval of some conversions performed by certain Orthodox rabbis. At year's end those cases awaited resolution by the Supreme Court. However, in June, in response to a High Court petition by the Jewish-Life Information Center challenging the denial of citizenship to some Orthodox converts, the government agreed that the MOI would henceforth rely on the Jewish Agency rather than the Chief Rabbinate regarding Orthodox conversions from abroad.

The JIJ submitted a petition to the High Court on February 10, calling for a change to the 2010 law that discriminates in the area of civil registration of couples, allowing them to register only if both partners are recognized as being "of no religion." The JIJ asked that the law be revoked, amended, or extended to all citizens regardless of religious belief. There were no developments in the case by year's end.

In June, the High Court ruled on a decade-old case that government financial support for over 100,000 yeshiva (religious studies) students over the age of 18 was illegal, as there was no basis for treating these students preferentially above all other students. The court ordered the government to remove the clause from the state budget. There continued to be much debate during the year over whether any state funding should be provided to schools that do not teach the core curriculum, including math, science, and language.

A Ministry of Justice-appointed committee recommended in August that all matters of property, child custody, and visitation rights be handled by civil family law courts, while the rabbinic courts be limited to the issuance of a "get," a Jewish religious bill of divorce.

There continued to be complaints that authorities used religious designations on identity cards in a discriminatory manner. The majority of identity cards still in circulation could be used to

identify non-Jews, even though the MOI stopped issuing new identity cards in 2007 that differentiated persons according to religion. According to a press article, Interior Minister Eli Yishai suggested reintroducing religious designations on a voluntary basis on new identity cards in spite of minority groups' apprehensions that such designations have been used in a discriminatory manner.

Some Muslims stated that there was insufficient state funding for Muslim affairs, including for building and restoring mosques and cemeteries, although the state did provide municipalities with religious development budgets and religious institutions with operational support funds. Many mosques lack an appointed imam, which is the responsibility of the MOI's Muslim Affairs Department, although the MOI added 20 imam positions during the year. The government allows non-state employees to be imams in mosques if the community prefers such an imam. The country also lacked any academic training center for the study of Islam to educate future imams and qadis (Sharia court judges), although the MOI Muslim Affairs Department did provide professional training.

While proselytism is officially legal, some missionaries continued to face harassment and discrimination from local government officials. For example, the MOI detained individuals suspected of being "missionaries" upon arrival at the airport and required such persons to post bail and pledge to abstain from missionary activity. At times government officials also have refused entry into the country to persons they perceived as missionaries.

Both recognized and unrecognized religious communities experienced some difficulties receiving clergy visas for their representatives and leaders. Many religious leaders complained that the MOI made arbitrary decisions leading to difficulties in maintaining consistent religious leadership for their communities within the country.

During the year members of many religious groups traveled to the country freely. However, according to representatives of Christian institutions, visa issuance rates for some of their religious workers remained low. The MOI granted multi-entry visas only to a limited list of members of the clergy and other religious workers seeking to travel to and between their parishes in the country and in the Occupied Territories. Other clergy who wished to return to or visit their parishes and congregations were required to apply for new, single-entry visas at Israeli consulates abroad – a process that at times took months.

Since the government did not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Muslim citizens traveled through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for performing the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). According to the government, travel to hostile countries, including travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, may be restricted. Palestinian religious groups faced some restrictions in practice, such as closures for security reasons and long waits at border crossings, which often impeded travel into the country for religious purposes.

According to government figures, the year's budget for religious services for the Jewish population was approximately NIS 415 million (\$112 million). Religious minorities, which constituted slightly more than 20 percent of the population, received approximately NIS 80 million (\$21.6 million), or 16 percent of total funding. The budgets for religious institutions for the Jewish population and religious minorities were not made public.

As in previous years, the Religious Affairs Ministry failed to implement the 1996 Alternative Burial Law, which established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony. The Religious Affairs Ministry did not use any of the funds allocated in the 2010 state budget for the development of civil, pluralistic burial plots. There were eight cemeteries for civil burials contracted with the Israeli National Insurance Institution, located in Kiryat Tiv'on, Kfar Haro'eh, Kefar Saba, Petah Tiqwa, Hazor, Revadim, Giv'at Brenner, and Be'er Sheva. The government contracted with some private cemeteries to provide burial solutions when no other options existed. During the year the Jerusalem municipality began building a new civil cemetery for use by those who do not want or cannot receive burial according to Orthodox rites. Citizens who seek civil burials in other regions must use private cemeteries located on kibbutzim (collective farms) at high personal cost, while state burials are free of charge.

A public transportation company, Egged, which operated much of the country's public transportation system, continued to operate some sex-segregated buses along inter- and intra-city routes frequented by Haredi Jews. Women who refused to sit at the back of such buses risked harassment and physical assault by male passengers. On January 6 the Supreme Court ruled to prohibit any enforcement of gender-segregated bus lines. The court ordered Egged to place signs in its buses informing riders of the court decision and warning that any attempt to harass individuals over their choice of seat would be a criminal offense. However, on December 16, a bus driver and a policeman asked a woman on a bus from Ashdod to Jerusalem to move to the back of the bus due to some Haredi riders' demands, although ultimately she was allowed to remain in her seat.

On June 23, the High Court ruled against the municipality of Be'er Sheva's plan to reopen a former mosque (1906-1948) as a Museum of the Cultures of the Sons of Abraham, and instead directed the city to open it solely as a Museum of Islamic Culture and Eastern Nations. The building had served as a court and prison until 1953 and as an archaeological museum until abandoned in 1992 due to structural problems. The ruling also instructed the petitioners (Muslim residents of Be'er Sheva) on their right to turn to the state planning committee to request that the current designation of the building as a museum be changed to a place of worship, and if rejected, their right to petition the court.

Interior Ministry officials continued to revoke citizenship or deny services to some citizens based on their religious beliefs, according to the JIJ. This included cases in which the MOI attempted to revoke the citizenship of persons discovered holding Messianic or Christian beliefs, or denied them some national services, including child registration, social benefits, Israeli identity cards, and passports. On November 15, the MOI notified a woman six months after she immigrated that her citizenship would be revoked due to her affiliation with Messianic Judaism and gave her 14 days to leave the country. In April, two returning Israeli citizens who left the country as minors were denied Israeli identity cards (which entitle them to basic rights and legal status) upon their return to the country due to their holding Messianic beliefs.

The MOI reportedly refused to process immigration applications from persons entitled to citizenship under the Law of Return if it was determined that such persons held Christian or Messianic Jewish religious beliefs, although the Law of Return has no such provision and specifically allows non-Jewish relatives of Jews to immigrate. According to the JIJ, in May the MOI refused to process the application of a Holocaust survivor due to her profession of Messianic Jewish beliefs.

After Jehovah's Witnesses held several meetings in the Raanana sports hall in November, city council member Ilan Cohen called publicly for halls to refuse to rent space for "missionary activities." Afterwards the sports hall could no longer find an available date for any future Jehovah's Witnesses' gathering. In Netanya on December 13, police fined two members of Jehovah's Witnesses NIS 730 (\$200) each for sharing their faith from door to door and passing out free literature, stating in the citation that such religious activity was "peddling" without a license. Authorities also confiscated their Bibles.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

As a result of criticism from the High Court, in August, the Ministries of Finance and Religion announced a significant increase in the budget allocation for non-Orthodox burials in civil cemeteries. The government notified the court that an annual budget of NIS 5 million (\$1.35 million) for the year and for 2012 would be allocated instead of the original budget allocation of NIS 300,000 (\$81,000).

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

During the year terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, carried out attacks against citizens of the country, mostly in the form of indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip. Terrorists often issued statements that contained anti-Semitic rhetoric in conjunction with the attacks.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Some Jewish individuals and groups were responsible for abusive and discriminatory practices against Israeli-Arab Muslims, evangelical Christians, and Messianic Jews, with approximately the same frequency as during the previous year.

Relations between other religious and ethnic groups, including Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, and secular and religious Jews, also continued to be strained. Such religious and ethnic tensions were fueled by historical grievances as well as by cultural and religious differences.

About 50 prominent rabbis, led by Safed Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, published a religious ruling in December 2010 that prohibited the sale or rental of real estate to non-Jews and called for the exclusion from religious gatherings of any Jewish person who broke the ruling. Despite widespread criticism of the Halachic ruling, the justice minister did not suspend Eliyahu from his post as a municipal rabbi. All of the signatories' salaries were paid by the government, including dozens of chief rabbis of cities across the country. The attorney general had not decided whether the signatories could be prosecuted for incitement by year's end.

The NGO Lehava, an acronym for "Preventing Assimilation in the Holy Land," which also means "flame," initiated a campaign in January to distribute "kosher certificates" to employers who purposefully avoided employing Arab workers. The certificates included the declaration: "This certificate certifies that the following employer employs Jewish workers and does not employ enemies."

Nazareth (population 72,000), the city with the country's largest Arab majority, experienced strained relations between its Muslim majority and its Christian minority. On October 6, 2010, Sheikh Nazem Abu Salim, the imam of the Shihab al-Din mosque, was indicted for inciting violence against Christians and Jews that resulted in attacks (including one Jewish death), supporting al-Qaida, and recruiting for global jihad. Some Arab Christians in Nazareth said that fear of reprisal by members of the Islamic Movement prevented them from proselytizing openly.

Umm el-Fahm, the country's second largest Arab majority city (population 45,000), was a source of continuing tension between Jews and Muslims. The city has an entirely Muslim population and has elected its leadership from the Islamic Movement since 1989, when Sheikh Raed Salah first became mayor. Over the past few years, Salah gained notoriety for busing Islamic Movement

followers from Umm el-Fahm to Jerusalem, where on several occasions Muslims on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif threw rocks down onto Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall.

On October 3, a mosque was set ablaze in Upper Galilee and the words "Revenge" and "Price Tag" were scrawled on the wall with charcoal. The perpetrators and their motives were unknown at year's end. On October 7, an unknown person or persons spray painted "Price Tag" and "Death to Arabs" on Christian and Muslim tombstones in Jaffa. On October 8, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a Jaffa synagogue. No one was arrested for these incidents due to lack of evidence, but public demonstrations were held and President Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu made statements condemning the acts.

There were numerous reports of anti-Semitic acts perpetrated by members of minority groups. For example, in October, unknown persons desecrated a number of synagogues in the city of Safed with inscriptions on the walls, including one that read "death to the Jews." The Safed police launched an investigation into the incident. The government operated a special department in the state attorney's office for prosecution of incitement-related crimes.

Societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally were negative. Most Jews opposed missionary activity directed at Jews, and some were hostile to Jewish converts to Christianity. The Messianic Jewish and Jehovah's Witnesses communities, among others, accused groups such as Yad L'Achim and Lev L'Achim, Jewish religious organizations opposed to missionary activity, of harassing and occasionally assaulting their members. According to JIJ attorneys and representatives of affected religious communities, Yad L'Achim pressured landlords, employers, and MOI officials to assist its campaigns against groups it deemed "dangerous cults." A September 1 *Jerusalem Post* article detailed the illegal practice of an anonymous group that posted flyers in Mevaseret Zion that named 10 individuals as Messianic Jews and included their pictures and home addresses.

During the year members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported assaults, threats of violence, and other crimes and noted the difficulties their members faced in convincing the police to investigate or apprehend the perpetrators. On August 13, in Holon, approximately 15 Haredi men disrupted a religious meeting held at a sports hall and one of them punched a member of the community. However, after police questioned the attacker, authorities only gave him a restraining order.

There continued to be tension between the majority of Israelis and Haredi communities, including concerns related to the allocation of housing, service in the IDF, participation in the workforce, and the increasing burden of transfer payments made to Haredi families, many of which received special government subsidies for families with five or more children.

Expressions of animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the year. Some members of Haredi Jewish groups acted in a discriminatory and intolerant manner toward other Jews. As in past years, there were instances of Haredim throwing rocks at passing motorists driving on the Sabbath in predominantly Haredi neighborhoods, and harassing or assaulting women whose appearance they considered immodest. On December 27, a group of Haredi men jeered and spat upon an eight-year-old girl they believed was dressed immodestly while she walked to her Orthodox school in Beit Shemesh. The president, prime minister, chief rabbi, and mayor all criticized the perpetrators' abusive behavior in their attempt to impose their religious standards on others.

There continued to be reports of numerous instances of Haredi men spitting at non-Haredi Jews and persons of different faiths, including in Jerusalem's Old City. In November the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court quashed a case against an Armenian priesthood student who punched a man who spat on him in 2008, noting in his ruling that "putting the defendant on trial for a single blow at a man who spat at his face, after suffering the degradation of being spat on for years while walking around in his church robes, is a fundamental contravention of the principles of justice and decency." The judge noted as well, "[n]eedless to say, spitting toward the defendant when he was wearing the robe is a criminal offense." According to a *Haaretz* report, church officials say that they try to ignore most instances, but also note that when they have complained police usually failed to find the perpetrators. The Chief Rabbinate spoke out repeatedly against such spitting attacks and encouraged rabbis in Jerusalem to criticize such behavior.

Interfaith dialogue often was linked to ongoing peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians and between the country and its Arab neighbors. A number of NGOs sought to build understanding and create dialogue among religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. These organizations included the Geshar Foundation; Meitarim, which operated a pluralistic, Jewish-oriented school system; and the Interreligious Coordinating Council, which promoted interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions.

The Israel Council of Religious Leaders, established in 2008, is the representative body of religious leaders whose status and communities are formally recognized by the government. To further interfaith understanding and promote religious freedom, the council meets annually, hosted by a different community on each occasion, and its standing committee meets quarterly. The council actively responded to attacks on holy sites and convened religious leaders alongside President Shimon Peres in the village of Tuba-Zangaria on October 3 to express solidarity with the local Muslim community after a mosque there was burned in an arson attack. A delegation of these religious leaders also traveled to the Vatican to meet with Pope Benedict XVI, highlighting the freedom of religion and cooperation between religious leaders in the country.

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land brings together the formal institutional religious leadership of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). It consists of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the PA Supreme Sharia Court, and the Christian Patriarchates and Bishops of the Holy Land. The council keeps open channels of communication between religious leaders; combats incitement, defamation, and misrepresentation; and provides the support of religious leadership for initiatives to end conflict and promote peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy consistently raised concerns about religious freedom with the MFA, the police, and other government agencies.

Embassy officials maintained a dialogue with NGOs that focused on human and civil rights, including religious freedom, and promoted interfaith initiatives. Embassy representatives also attended and spoke at meetings of such organizations and encouraged religious leaders to advance regional peace and calm local tensions. The embassy offered programs that exposed Israelis to U.S. models of religious diversity and civil society.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Executive Summary

Religious freedom in various parts of the Occupied Territories falls under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel, or Hamas (in the Gaza Strip). The laws and policies of the PA and Israel protect religious freedom, and in practice the two governments generally respected these rights. Neither the PA nor Israel demonstrated a trend toward improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. The "de facto" Hamas authorities in Gaza restricted religious freedom, and the regime's level of respect for religious freedom in law and in practice remained problematic during the year.

The PA does not have a constitution, but the Palestinian Basic Law generally functions as a temporary constitution. The basic law provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites, unless such practices violate public order or morality. PA policy protected the generally free practice of religion, although problems persisted during the year. The basic law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Sharia (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation. The basic law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law and that basic human rights are liberties that shall be protected.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel's Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for the protection of religious freedom. The Israeli government respected the right to freedom of religion within the Occupied Territories during the year, although the government's closure policies and the separation barrier restricted the ability of Palestinian Muslims and Christians to reach some places of worship and to practice their religious rites, particularly in Jerusalem. Israeli security authorities at times restricted Muslim and Christian worship within Jerusalem. Israeli policies also limited the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control.

Since the 2007 Hamas coup in the Gaza Strip, Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, has exercised de facto authority over the territory and has enforced conservative Islamic law, harassed non-Muslims, and imposed religious restrictions on women.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations during the year in the Occupied Territories and in Jerusalem. However, societal tensions remained high among Jewish communities, and between Jews and non-Jews; continuing violence heightened those tensions.

U.S. consulate general officials in Jerusalem monitor religious persecution and discrimination, and raise instances of alleged abuses or discriminatory practices with the relevant government officials at all levels, as well as with religious and human rights groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 98 percent of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories are Sunni Muslims. Although there is no official count, there are 51,710 Christians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, according to the Diyar Consortium, a Lutheran ecumenical institution. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder consists of Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Episcopalians, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Lutherans, Maronites, Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, and several other Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated primarily in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Bethlehem, but smaller communities exist elsewhere. A very small number of adherents of several denominations of evangelical Christians, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, reside in the West Bank. There is also a community of approximately 400 Samaritans in the West Bank.

According to local Christian leaders, Palestinian Christian emigration has accelerated since 2001, reducing the number of Christians in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories. Lower birth rates among Palestinian Christians also contribute to their shrinking numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The laws and policies of the PA protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The PA does not have a constitution but has stated that the Palestinian basic law functions as its temporary constitution. The basic law and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The basic law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Islamic law shall be the main source of legislation. It provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites, unless they violate public order or morality. The basic law also proscribes discrimination based on religion, stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law, and holds that basic human rights and liberties shall be protected.

Islam is the official religion of the PA, and Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential financial support from the government. The PA Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) and Religious Affairs pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques, and also pays the salaries of most Palestinian imams in the West Bank. The ministry also provides limited financial support to some Christian clergymen and Christian charitable organizations. The PA does not provide financial support to Jewish institutions in the West Bank; the Israeli government controls most Jewish holy sites in the West Bank.

Personal status law for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Sharia, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. Islamic or Christian religious courts must handle all legal matters relating to personal status. In general all legal matters related to personal status – including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support – are handled by such courts, which exist for most Muslim and Christian traditions.

A 1995 PA presidential decree stipulated that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA would continue in force until the PA enacted new laws or amended the old ones. The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers.

All legally recognized individual sects are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and most do so in practice. The PA does not have a civil marriage law. Legally members of one religious group may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different denomination to adjudicate it, but this was not known to occur in practice. Churches that are not officially recognized by the PA must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters; many unrecognized churches advise their members to marry or divorce abroad.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas has informal advisors on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council are reserved for Christians; there are no seats reserved for members of any other religion.

Churches in the West Bank and Gaza operate under one of three statuses: churches recognized by the PA in accordance with the status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century and Protestant churches with established episcopates; Protestant, including evangelical, churches established between the late 19th century and 1967, which, although they exist and operate, are not recognized officially by the PA; and a small number of churches that have become active within the last decade and whose legal status is less certain.

The PA respects the 19th century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities that govern the first group of churches. These agreements specifically established the presence and rights of the Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Coptic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox churches. The Episcopal and Evangelical Lutheran churches were added later to this list. Upon its establishment, the PA recognized these churches and their rights. These religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. Civil courts do not adjudicate such matters.

Churches in the second category, which includes the Assemblies of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, have unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements. They are permitted to operate freely and some are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third category consists of a small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These churches also generally operated unhindered by the PA.

The PA requires the teaching of religion in PA-operated schools with separate courses for Muslim and Christian students. A compulsory curriculum requires the study of Christianity for Christian students and Islam for Muslim students in grades one through six.

Church leaders cited the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions, difficulties in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits for Christian clergy, Israeli government family-reunification restrictions, and taxation problems as reasons for increased emigration.

The site referred to by Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Jews refer to the same place as the Temple Mount and recognize it as the foundation of the first and second Jewish temples. The location has been under Israeli control since 1967, when Israel captured the eastern sector of the city (the Israeli government formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, and Israel applies its laws in East Jerusalem). However, the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is administered by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Islamic trust and charitable organization.

Under Oslo-era agreements, both Israel and the PA share responsibility for the Ibrahim Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, although disagreements over division of responsibilities are significant.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel's Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for the protection of religious freedom, although the government's closure and curfew policies and its separation barrier restricted the ability of Palestinian Muslims and Christians to reach some places of worship and to practice their religious rites at certain locations, particularly in Jerusalem. Israel's separation barrier also limited access to holy sites and seriously hindered the work of religious organizations and their delivery of humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians, especially in and around East Jerusalem. Israeli security authorities at times restricted Muslim and Christian worship within Jerusalem. Israeli policies also limited the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control.

Since the 2007 Hamas coup in the Gaza Strip, Hamas has exercised de facto authority over the territory and has enforced conservative Islamic law, harassed non-Muslims, and imposed religious restrictions on women.

The PA observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, and Christmas (both Western and Orthodox). The PA maintains a Friday-Saturday weekend, but Christians are allowed to take Sunday off instead of Saturday. Christians take Easter as a paid religious holiday.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including of religious prisoners and detainees.

The PA has implemented a policy of unifying the message in weekly sermons in the West Bank in an effort to control incitement from the pulpit. Before the ban on incitement, imams sometimes were accused of delivering hateful sermons. The PA also prohibited the broadcast of Qur'an recitations from minarets in the West Bank prior to the call to prayer. The PA oversaw approximately 1,800 mosques in the West Bank and paid imams' salaries.

Anti-Semitic sermons promoting incitement were given by clergy in Gaza, including one by a Hamas preacher that called for the death of Jews.

PA TV broadcasted a documentary in which Jewish religious rites were characterized as "sin and filth." Some groups, like Hamas, continued to make frequent anti-Semitic statements during the year.

Members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community contended that PA-appointed clerics declared Ahmadi to be apostates, resulting in a rise of anti-Ahmadiyya activity in the West Bank. These Ahmadi reported that the PA's Sharia courts annulled several Ahmadiyya marriages during the year.

During the year the PA began refusing church-issued documents from the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem. PA officials claimed that status quo churches in the West Bank in 2010 demanded that the PA discontinue recognizing legal-status documents – particularly marriage certificates – issued by the First Baptist Church, stating that the documents were allowing West Bank Palestinians to convert from their original church in order to divorce and remarry under terms their original church did not permit.

The PA and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) jointly provided access for approved visits by Jews to holy sites in the West Bank in areas under PA security control (Area A), particularly to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. Some Jews complained that securing an IDF escort to Jewish holy sites in Area A required extensive coordination. Jewish groups visited the site during hours of darkness and with a significant PA and IDF security escort. The PA and IDF coordinated the visit of 1,300 Jewish worshipers who came to pray overnight on October 5 at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus before Yom Kippur. Upon arrival the worshippers reportedly found spray-painted swastikas and other graffiti on the walls. The Israeli civil administration filed a complaint with the Palestinian Authority.

Some observers of archaeological practices in Jerusalem alleged that the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), a government entity, exploited archaeological finds that bolster Jewish claims

to the city while overlooking other historically-significant archaeological finds. The archaeological finds in the area of Silwan underscore early Jewish history in Jerusalem; critics said that the IAA and Elad (a Jewish settler organization with excavation responsibilities) undervalued the area's diverse religious history and were intent on highlighting only the city's Jewish history.

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation continued to promote ongoing archaeological excavations north of the Western Wall plaza. Supporters of the project have said that the archaeological finds shed light on the Jewish presence in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period. However, the excavations occur in the Muslim Quarter underneath mostly Arab-owned properties, creating friction with the Old City's Arab residents.

Construction for the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in West Jerusalem continued during the year on the grounds of the Mamilla cemetery, a 1,000-year-old Muslim cemetery containing the gravesites of several prominent Palestinian families and, according to Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad's companions and tens of thousands of Salah ad-Din's warriors. In October 2008 Israel's high court ruled that the Simon Wiesenthal Center could continue construction of the museum, despite the objections of several Muslim organizations. In July the national-level Jerusalem District Planning Committee voted to permit the issuance of construction permits for a revised, scaled-down plan of the museum. According to press reports, this construction has resulted in the excavation and dumping of skeletal remains. The project has received criticism from Islamic and Palestinian institutions. Supporters of the U.S.-based center cited an 1894 ruling by the Islamic law court, which stated that the cemetery was no longer sacred because it was abandoned. The high court explained in its ruling that the construction site had served as a municipal parking lot for almost 50 years without a single complaint leveled against such use, and noted that Islamic authorities in 1929 had allowed construction in other parts of the abandoned cemetery. Ahmad Natour, president of the Sharia appeals court, Israel's religious court for Muslim issues, stated in February that the sanctity of Muslim cemeteries was "eternal" and disputed the authority of the judge who authorized the parking lot, claiming that the judge did not follow legal procedure and that he was later convicted of criminal fraud. Some Islamic groups continued to object to the project on religious grounds during the year. On June 27, between 50 and 70 original tombstones were demolished overnight by bulldozers in an area of the cemetery not slated for construction.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL – an umbrella body of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious institutions that includes the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the PA Ministry of Islamic Waqf, the PA Islamic Sharia courts, and the Christians Patriarchates and Bishops of the Holy Land), and foreign governments strongly criticized the September 5 arson attack against a mosque in Qusra, in the West Bank, and a number of rabbis visited the village to express their criticism of the arson to residents. The prime minister's spokesman called the arson "an act of extremism that aims to compromise the relationship between different religions in Israel," and said that Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered police and security forces to arrest those responsible.

The government of Israel continued to apply travel restrictions during the year that impeded access to particular places of worship in the West Bank and Jerusalem for Muslims and Christians. Strict closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli government negatively affected residents' ability to practice their religion at holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as well as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The Israeli government kept in place an amended visa issuance process for foreigners working in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories, which also significantly impeded the work of Christian institutions. Reports of Christian clergy, nuns, and other religious workers unable to secure residency or work permits increased during the year. Christian advocates claimed that the difficulty of obtaining permits gradually worsened in the last 10 years. Israeli authorities continued to limit visas for Arab Christian clergy serving in the West Bank or Jerusalem to single-entry visas, complicating clergy travel, particularly to areas under their pastoral authority outside the West Bank or Jerusalem. This disrupted their work and caused financial difficulties for their sponsoring religious organizations. Clergy, nuns, and other religious workers from Arab countries faced long delays and sometimes authorities denied their applications. The Israeli government indicated that delays or denials were due to security processing for visas and extensions.

Separately Israel generally prohibited entry into Gaza by Arab Christian clergy, including bishops and other senior clergy to visit congregations or ministries under their pastoral authority.

The Israeli government granted 400 permits to members of Gaza's Christian community to enter Israel and the West Bank to associate with family members located outside Gaza during Christmas. However, permits were not issued to all members of a family, which religious contacts said reduced the overall number of permits used, as families opted not to be separated on the holy day. No permits were issued for male Gazans between 16 and 45 years old.

The government of Israel's construction of a separation barrier, begun in 2002 due to security concerns, limited access to holy sites and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The Israeli government made some accommodations for Palestinian Christians in the West Bank to access Jerusalem for religious purposes, although it made few accommodations for Palestinian Muslims to enter Jerusalem for religious purposes. During the month of Ramadan, the Israeli authorities temporarily increased

access for Palestinian West Bank residents without a permit to Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to include men over the age of 50 and women over the age of 45. Married men between the ages of 40 and 50 and women between the ages of 35 and 45 were made eligible for special permits. Israeli authorities also temporarily permitted West Bank residents to use the Beit El checkpoint to exit Ramallah en route to Jerusalem, instead of just the Qalandiya crossing.

The separation barrier significantly impeded Bethlehem-area Christians from reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Jerusalem side of the barrier. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers occasionally experienced difficulty obtaining access to Christian holy sites in the West Bank because of the barrier and Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank.

The barrier and checkpoints also impeded the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, as well as the movement of congregations between their homes and places of worship. Construction of the separation barrier continued south of Jerusalem near the Cremisan convent of Salesian nuns and their school of approximately 170 students. The barrier, if completed, would separate the convent and school from the Palestinian communities they serve.

The Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount has been under Israeli control since 1967 but the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf maintains administrative custody of the site. The government of Israel, as a matter of stated policy since 1967, opposes non-Muslim worship at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and many Jewish leaders promote the view that Jewish law prohibits Jews from entering the compound due to the risk of accidentally defiling the (unknown) location of the Temple's Holy of Holies, and they instead direct worshippers to the Western Wall. Israeli police generally did not permit public prayer by non-Muslims and publicly indicated that this policy remained operative, even though non-Muslims visited the compound. Israeli police regulated traffic in and out of the compound and screened non-Muslims for religious paraphernalia.

The government of Israel restricted access to the Haram al-Sharif /Temple Mount for Muslims in the Occupied Territories and occasionally restricted access for Muslims resident in Jerusalem. While West Bank Muslims with permits to enter Jerusalem generally were able to visit the site, and in isolated cases permits were issued for Muslims to enter Jerusalem for religious purposes, Israel's permitting regime also generally restricted most West Bank Muslims from accessing the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Israeli government provided Muslims from Gaza no opportunity to access the site. Israeli security authorities in Jerusalem frequently restricted access to Friday prayers at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for residents in East Jerusalem. Citing security concerns, authorities also frequently barred entry of male residents under the age of 50, and sometimes barred women under the age of 45. Infrequently authorities would close the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount entirely, often after skirmishes at the compound between Arabs and Israeli police.

Israeli authorities in some instances barred specific individuals from the compound, including high-ranking Palestinian officials and Jerusalem Islamic Waqf employees. Waqf officials complained that Israeli police increasingly violated agreements regarding control of access to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site. Israeli police have de facto control of the compound, with police stationed outside each entrance to the site and also conducting routine patrols on the outdoor plaza. Israeli police have exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance – the only entrance through which non-Muslims may enter the compound – and in general allowed visitors through the gate during set visiting hours. Waqf employees were stationed inside each gate and on the plaza, and they could object to the presence of particular persons, such as individuals dressed immodestly or causing disturbances, but they lacked effective authority to remove persons from the site.

Israeli authorities and Jerusalem Islamic Waqf officials generally prohibited non-Muslim worship at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Israeli High Court ruled in 1997 that "Jews, even though their right to the Temple Mount exists and stands historically, are not permitted to currently actualize their right to perform public prayer on the Temple Mount." Although most mainline Orthodox Jewish teaching discourages Jewish visits to the compound, some Jewish organizations have legally and physically challenged these restrictions. During the year several Jewish groups visited the compound, escorted by Israeli police, and performed religious acts such as prayers and prostration. Waqf officials criticized the visits, and in some instances, the visits sparked violence between Arabs and Israeli police. Christians were prohibited from performing public prayers at the site. According to local media reports, on August 23, Israeli police escorted some 40 Israeli activists onto the compound. The presence of the activists reportedly caused a commotion among Arab worshippers; police arrested five Arab worshippers and removed them from the area.

There were also disputes between the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf and Israeli authorities over Israeli restrictions on Waqf attempts to carry out maintenance and physical improvements to the compound and its mosques. Israeli officials said the Waqf is required to coordinate all changes to the compound with the Israeli government; Waqf officials generally refused to coordinate maintenance and upkeep because they said this violates previous agreements between Israel and the Jordanian government.

The approval process for a permanent ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount continued during the year. Excavations in the immediate vicinity of the Mughrabi Gate did not proceed.

The Western Wall, the place of worship nearest the holiest site in Judaism, was open to visitors from all religions during the year, and Muslims and Christians were permitted to make individual prayers at the site. However, the Israeli government exercised its prohibition of mixed gender prayer services at religious sites. Men and women at the Western Wall must use separate areas to visit and pray, and the women's section is less than half the size of the men's section. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which manages the infrastructure at the Western Wall plaza, announced in August that it would replace the existing partition separating women and men with a one-way mirror, which would allow women to observe religious services in the men's section, such as bar mitzvahs, while preventing men from seeing through to the women's section. Women are not allowed to conduct prayers at the Western Wall while wearing prayer shawls and are not permitted to read from Torah scrolls. The gender restrictions also affect Muslims and Christians at this site.

Arab Christian leaders said that Israeli security authorities obstructed access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for Palestinian Christian residents of the West Bank, including clergy, which significantly reduced their ability to enter Jerusalem. Some Christian leaders said that Israeli authorities gave preferential treatment to Jews celebrating Passover and to international visitors making pilgrimages when the authorities enacted restrictions that impeded the activities of local Christians celebrating Easter. Jerusalem Christians had to pass through four police checkpoints before reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; according to Christian advocates, pepper spray was used indiscriminately at the various checkpoints. On Good Friday, the Israeli police temporarily blocked the Latin Patriarch from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and pushed him, to make way for pilgrims, setting off a small fight before the procession was allowed to continue, according to a joint report by the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre. During other holy days, Christian leaders also stated that the police did not always honor requests to provide security escorts for religious processions, which left them vulnerable to harassment in the Old City from non-Christians.

During the year Israeli authorities severely limited the access of Palestinians to Rachel's Tomb, a Bethlehem shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Israeli jurisdiction in Area C, but allowed relatively unimpeded access to Jewish visitors.

During the year the IDF limited access to the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a holy site revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. The IDF restricted Muslim access to the site for 10 nonconsecutive days, including Passover and Yom Kippur; Jews were restricted access to the site for 10 nonconsecutive days corresponding with Muslim holidays. Muslims may enter only through one entry point, and must submit to intensive IDF security screening. Jews have access to several entry points and are not required to submit to security screening. Both Muslims and Jews are able to pray at the site simultaneously; in only one space, through the tomb of Abraham, can both sides see one another through Plexiglas.

While there were no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians making the Hajj, in practice, closures and long waits at Israeli-controlled crossings often impeded travel for religious purposes for all Palestinian religious groups.

Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the Israeli government has prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under civil and security control of the PA. This restriction prevents Jewish Israelis from routinely visiting several Jewish holy sites, although the IDF occasionally provides security escorts for groups to visit selected Jewish holy sites. Beginning in 2009 restrictions on Arab Israelis visiting Area A cities in the West Bank gradually were lifted by the Israeli Ministry of Defense's coordinator for government activities in the Territories.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Hamas maintained control of Gaza throughout the year and sometimes exploited its security apparatus to arrest or detain Muslims in Gaza who did not abide by Hamas' strict interpretation of Islam.

During the year terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, carried out attacks against Israeli citizens, mostly in the form of indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip. Terrorists often issued statements that contained anti-Semitic rhetoric in conjunction with the attacks.

Hamas maintained control of Gaza throughout the year and enforced a conservative interpretation of Islam on Gaza's Muslim population. For example Hamas operated a women's prison during the year to house women convicted of "ethical crimes" such as "illegitimate pregnancy." During the year Hamas' "morality police" punished women for riding motorcycles and dressing "inappropriately." Inappropriate dress included wearing Western clothing, such as jeans and blouses, short-sleeved shirts, and in some cases, not wearing a head covering. Couples in public frequently were stopped, separated, and questioned by plainclothes officers to determine if they were married; premarital sex is a crime punishable by imprisonment. Hamas also harassed men and women to dress modestly, tried to enforce sexual segregation in public, confiscated novels it deemed offensive to Islam from a bookshop, banned women from smoking, and arbitrarily closed or restricted businesses that allowed unmarried and unrelated men and women to "mix," according to press reports and Human Rights Watch.

During the year Hamas and other violent extremists in Gaza sought to bolster attendance at their youth programs and marginalize programs that did not teach a strict interpretation of Islam. Local religious leaders also received warning ahead of Christian holidays against any public display of Christianity.

Hamas largely tolerated the small Christian presence in Gaza and did not force Christians to abide by Islamic law, although they were indirectly affected by Hamas' religious ideology, according to church leaders.

Due to Hamas' continued control of Gaza, the PA was unable to investigate and prosecute Gaza-based cases of religious discrimination.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The PA did not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue during the year; however, it sent representatives to meetings on improving interreligious relations and supported efforts to foster goodwill among religious leaders.

The PA continued coordinating with the local leaders of the Greek Orthodox, Franciscans (representing the Latin Patriarchate), and Armenian Orthodox churches to raise funds for repairs and to conduct a study of the roof ahead of restoration work on the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The churches stated that the PA's involvement as a neutral party helped them to reach an agreement where they had failed to do so in the past by themselves. The PA also funded renovations to Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, which began in 2010 and concluded during the year.

PA-Israeli security cooperation at Joseph's Tomb improved during the year. The PA reached an agreement with the IDF and the Ministry of Defense's civil administration to station 10 permanent police officers at the tomb, according to press reports. The PA also implemented strict rules of engagement to prevent the improper use of force. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the PA Ministry of Islamic Waqf, and the PA Islamic Sharia courts continued dialogue through the CRIHL. On September 5, the CRIHL strongly criticized the arson and vandalism of four mosques; it also spoke out against other acts of religious intolerance during the year.

The Israeli high court ruled in 2010 that the segregation of men and women on some public streets and sidewalks in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She'arim in Jerusalem was illegal. The ruling ended a tradition of gender segregation during the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Local authorities gave permission for a barrier to be erected again this year and the high court upheld its previous decision, stating that this was the last year such a barrier would be allowed.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Palestinian Christians and Muslims generally shared good relations, identifying more closely on ethnic and political similarities than religion. However, tensions were substantial between Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims, largely as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Relations among Jews living in Jerusalem and the West Bank were strained because of different interpretations of Judaism, and some non-Orthodox Jews and Christians experienced discrimination and harassment by some Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews. Christians also faced discrimination and threats from Muslim extremist vigilante groups in Gaza, and Hamas did not sufficiently investigate or prosecute religiously driven crimes committed by such groups.

Some settlers continued to threaten "price tag" attacks this year on Palestinians in response to Israeli government actions that were contrary to settlers' interests. These attacks increased from four in 2010 to 10 such incidents during the year, which included acts of vandalism, arson, and anti-Muslim graffiti on mosques located primarily in the West Bank, as well as anti-Christian graffiti on churches in Jerusalem. On September 5, Jewish settlers vandalized and set fire to the al-Nurayn mosque in the West Bank village of Qusra in what Israeli and Palestinian media speculated was a "price tag" attack in reprisal for Israel's dismantling of three buildings in Migron, a settlement outpost constructed on privately owned Palestinian land, hours earlier. The mosque's walls were spray-painted with the Star of David and the slogan "Migron and 'Alel Ayin are Social Justice," and with anti-Muslim graffiti, such as "Mohammed is a pig."

Israeli settlers in the West Bank on several occasions during the year framed violence against Palestinian persons and property as necessary for the defense of Judaism. Some Jewish groups called for the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque to enable the building of a third Jewish temple.

Some Haredim at the Western Wall harassed visitors and Jewish worshippers who did not conform to Jewish Orthodox traditions. Members of the Jewish Conservative Masorti and reform movements publicly criticized the growing "Haredization" of the Western Wall throughout the year.

In Jerusalem some ultra-Orthodox Jews denigrated Jerusalem residents who did not adhere to their strict interpretation of Orthodox Jewish law. Haredim protested municipal and commercial properties in Jerusalem that did not observe the Jewish Sabbath.

Some ultra-Orthodox youth in religious studies programs insulted and spat on Christian clergy, nuns, and seminarians in Jerusalem's Old City and vandalized several monasteries. According to a press report, four ultra-Orthodox men in March spat at Armenian Orthodox clergymen in a funeral procession.

The ultra-Orthodox anti-missionary organization Yad L'Achim, led by Rabbi Shalom Dov Lifshitz, continued to harass Messianic Jews (people who identify as Jews and follow Jewish traditions but believe Jesus was the Messiah) in settlements whom it identified, often incorrectly, as "missionaries." The group continued to distribute posters that threatened missionaries and also called on the postal authority to prevent the distribution of missionary material through the mail.

A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain recognition in areas administered by Israel and the PA. This treatment was attributed to alleged concerns among Muslim and established churches about proselytizing by these groups and disruption of the status quo.

Official PA media sought to control and eliminate statements and material that could be considered incitement; criticism largely focused on the policies and actions of the government of Israel and Israeli citizens, and not on religious factors.

Mainstream independent Palestinian news outlets, including *Al Quds*, *Al Ayyam*, and *Ma'an*, attempted to avoid publishing material that incited hatred and limited their criticism to governmental policies and actions of individuals and not of ethnic or religious groups. Nonetheless anti-Semitic expressions by opinion writers were carried in the mainstream Palestinian media, including claims by a Muslim cleric that Judaism is a "distorted, corrupted, falsified religion" and that Jews are inherently evil, having inherited their nature from Cain who, according to the Bible, murdered his brother Abel.

Other unofficial PA and nonmainstream Palestinian media outlets, particularly those controlled by Hamas, continued to use inflammatory language during the year. Hamas television broadcast content that sometimes praised holy war to expel the Jewish presence in the region. In addition some children's programs broadcast glorified "martyrdom."

Zayzafouna, a Palestinian youth magazine funded by UNESCO, published a story about a teenage girl who dreams of four role models, one of whom was Hitler. In the dream Hitler tells the girl that he killed the Jews "so you would all know that they are a nation which spreads destruction all over the world." UNESCO cut funding of Zayzafouna following the publication of this anti-Semitic content. However, the PA continued to fund the magazine and Zayzafouna continued to publish questionable material.

According to press reports, in August Jerusalem Mufti Muhammad Hussein publicly criticized Israel's designation of some holy sites in Jerusalem and the West Bank as Israeli heritage sites, saying that Israelis and Palestinians were "now in a period of war, not one with tanks and rockets, but one of religion, faith, and distorting Islamic history and tradition." He also claimed that Israel was preparing to destroy the Haram al-Sharif (Dome of the Rock) and al-Aqsa Mosque.

Hamas' efforts to bolster conservative principles in Gaza negatively affected some Gazan Christians, and they raised concerns that Hamas failed to defend their rights as religious minorities.

The desecration of the Mount of Olives cemetery in Jerusalem continued throughout the year. Jewish tombstones in the Mount of Olives cemetery were vandalized during the year, trash commonly littered the cemetery, and maintenance was largely insufficient. The prime minister's office funded the installation of security cameras at the Mount of Olives cemetery. The cemetery is monitored in real-time and the footage proved successful in prosecuting offenders during the year.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination between Christians and Muslims, and societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity. However, conversion is not illegal under PA law. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Interfaith dating remained a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories pressured their children, especially their daughters, to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm, particularly Palestinian Christians or Muslims who married Jews, encountered considerable societal and family opposition. Nongovernmental organization advocates reported that it was more difficult for Christian Palestinians to get a divorce because of restrictions by some churches.

Harassment of Messianic Jews by Orthodox Jews continued during the year.

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Established Christian groups generally did not welcome less-established churches. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims who opposed their proselytizing and from Christians who feared the new arrivals might disrupt existing conditions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem regularly met with religious representatives to ensure their views were reported and addressed. The consulate general maintained a high level of contact with representatives of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf. U.S. government officials had frequent contact with Muslim leaders throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank. The consulate general also maintained regular contact with leaders of the Christian and Jewish communities in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. During the year the consul general and consulate general officers met with the Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchs; leaders of the Syrian Orthodox, Egyptian Coptic, Greek Melkite Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches; and Christian evangelical groups. Consulate general officers met with Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Haredi rabbis, and with representatives of various Jewish institutions.

During the year the consulate general investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites, and visited the Cremisan convent of Salesian nuns. Consulate general officers met with representatives of the Bethlehem and Ramallah-area Christian communities.

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