

FRANCE 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. The government investigated and prosecuted numerous crimes and other actions against religious groups, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence, hate speech, and vandalism. The government continued to enforce laws prohibiting face coverings in public spaces and government buildings and the wearing of “conspicuous” religious symbols at public schools, which included a ban on headscarves and Sikh turbans. The highest administrative court rejected the city of Villeneuve-Loubet’s ban on “clothes demonstrating an obvious religious affiliation worn by swimmers on public beaches.” The ban was directed at full-body swimming suits worn by some Muslim women. ISIS claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in Nice during the July 14 French independence day celebration that killed 84 people without regard for their religious belief. President Francois Hollande condemned the attack as an act of radical Islamic terrorism. Prime Minister (PM) Manuel Valls cautioned against scapegoating Muslims or Islam for the attack by a radical extremist group. The government extended a state of emergency until July 2017. The government condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Catholic acts and continued efforts to promote interfaith understanding through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogues in schools, among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported 19 instances in which authorities interfered with public proselytizing by their community.

There were continued reports of attacks against Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The government, as well as Muslim and Jewish groups, reported the number of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents decreased by 59 percent and 58 percent respectively from the previous year to 335 anti-Semitic acts and 189 anti-Muslim acts. Anti-Christian incidents increased by 17 percent compared to the previous year. Attacks against Muslims included violence against women wearing veils or headscarves, online hate speech, and destruction and vandalism of property. In July two ISIS militants killed a priest and wounded a male worshipper during a Mass. Jehovah’s Witnesses cited incidents of violence against their members, including one killing, and they and other Christian groups reported attacks against religious sites. Representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities took steps to condemn intolerance and promote religious understanding and freedom. After the killing of the Catholic priest, Muslims

attended masses and hundreds of people of different faiths marched in solidarity with Catholics.

The U.S. embassy as well as staff from the consulates general and the American presence posts (APPs) continued to discuss religious freedom issues with the national government and local officials, including with the interior ministry and its religious affairs office as well as the religious affairs office in the foreign ministry and the Interministerial Delegation for the Fight Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT Hate (DILCRAH). In June the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited and engaged government and community leaders to discuss anti-Semitism and racism. The embassy, consulates general, and APPs promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups and engaged with civil society, religious groups, and NGOs throughout the country. In March the U.S. Special Representative to Muslim Communities conducted a series of meetings and engagements with Muslim youth and community leaders in Paris and Marseille.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 66.8 million (July 2016 estimate). The French government does not maintain official statistics on religious affiliation, but government studies occasionally provide estimates. According to the most recent study by the National Institute for Demographic Studies, conducted in 2008 and published in 2010, 45 percent of respondents aged 18-50 reported no religious affiliation, 43 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 8 percent as Muslim, 2 percent as Protestant, and the remaining 2 percent as Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, or other.

A 2012 poll by the private firm Conseil, Sondage et Analyse found 56 percent of respondents older than 18 years identify as Catholic. The Ministry of Interior estimates 8 to 10 percent of the population is Muslim. The Muslim population consists primarily of immigrants from former French colonies in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and their descendants.

The daily newspaper *Le Parisien* estimates there are 1.2 million Protestants, 500,000 of whom are evangelical. Many evangelical churches primarily serve African and Caribbean immigrants. The Buddhist Union of France estimates there are one million Buddhists, mainly Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. According to press reports, the Jewish community numbers approximately 500,000; approximately 40 percent identifies as Sephardic, 26

percent as Ashkenazi, and 14 percent as a mix from the two communities, while the remaining 20 percent identifies only as Jewish. Other religious groups estimate their numbers as follows: Jehovah's Witnesses, 120,000; Orthodox Christians, most of whom are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches, 80-100,000; The Church of Scientology, 45,000; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 36,000 in metropolitan France and 22,000 in overseas departments and territories; and Sikhs, 30,000, with the largest concentration in the Parisian suburbs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states the country is a secular republic and the state "shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law," regardless of religion, and respect all beliefs. The law provides for the separation of religion and state and guarantees the free exercise of religious worship except in the interest of maintaining the public order.

The law, as well as international and European covenants, which carry the force of law in the country, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with the freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of 1,500 euros (\$1,580) and imprisonment of one month. Individuals who are defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of any law they say impedes their freedom of religion.

Laws increase the penalties for acts of violence or defamation when they are committed because of the victim's actual or perceived membership or nonmembership in a given religious group. For acts of violence which courts determine are religiously motivated, the penalties are three to five years' imprisonment and fines of 45,000-75,000 euros (\$47,418-\$79,031), depending on the severity of the victims' injuries. For religiously motivated acts of public defamation, the penalties are one year's imprisonment and/or a fine of 45,000 euros (\$47,418). The government may expel noncitizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

Although not required by law, religious groups may apply to register to gain official recognition and become eligible for tax-exempt status. The law defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations of worship,

which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in profit making as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories. For example, Mormons perform religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school through their cultural association.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and receive tax-exempt status. Once granted, the tax-exempt status is applicable nationwide. In order to qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include religious training and the construction of buildings serving the religious group. Among excluded activities are those purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in conformity with the law, however, the government may change the association's status and require it to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status.

The law prohibits covering one's face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces such as restaurants and movie theaters. If the police encounter someone in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they are legally required to ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. Police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. An individual, however, may not be questioned or held for more than four hours. Refusal of a police instruction to remove the face-covering garment carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$158) or attendance at a citizenship course. Individuals who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority are subject to a fine of 30,000 euros (\$31,612) and can receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the victim is a minor.

According to the law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. The law also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The state owns and is responsible for the upkeep of most places of worship, primarily Catholic, built before 1905. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

There are three classes of territories where the law separating religion and state does not apply. Because Alsace-Lorraine was part of Germany when the law was enacted, members of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments in that region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. French Guiana, which is governed under 19th century colonial laws, may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Overseas departments and territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This also applies to the portion of Antarctica which the government claims as an overseas territory.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees and students from wearing “conspicuous religious symbols,” including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Religious instruction is not provided in public schools, except in Alsace-Lorraine, French Guiana, and overseas departments and territories. Information about religious groups, however, is taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear conspicuous religious symbols or to be given religious instruction in school may homeschool or send their children to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools.

By law the government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. In 98 percent of private schools, in accordance with the law, the government pays the teachers’ salaries, provided the school accepts all children regardless of an individual child’s religious affiliation. The law does not address the issue of religious instruction in government-subsidized private schools or whether students must be allowed to opt out of such instruction.

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

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

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

Government Practices

The government investigated and prosecuted crimes against religious groups, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence, hate speech and vandalism. The government’s ban against face coverings in public places was confirmed by various court rulings. The highest administrative court rejected the city of Villeneuve-Loubet’s ban on “clothes demonstrating an obvious religious affiliation worn by swimmers on public beaches.” Several city mayors – including the mayor of Nice – dismissed the verdict and said they would continue to enforce bans on full-body swimwear at public beaches, arguing that its use could disturb public order by leading to fights on the beach, but there were no additional reported cases. ISIS claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in Nice during the July 14 independence day celebration that killed 84 people without regard for their religious belief. President Hollande condemned the attack as an act of radical Islamic terrorism. PM Valls cautioned against scapegoating Muslims or Islam for the attack by a radical extremist group. The government extended the state of emergency which the government originally declared following the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, until July 2017. It ended the permanent deployment of security forces at religious sites across the country which had been in effect since the January 2015 terrorist attacks but continued to use roving security forces to monitor the religious sites. Government officials and political party members made statements condemning “Islamic extremism.” The president and government officials condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Catholic acts. The government continued efforts to promote interfaith understanding through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogue in schools, among local officials, police, and citizen groups.

A French Tunisian man, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, drove a large truck into a crowd of people, without regard for their religious affiliation, celebrating the Bastille Day holiday in Nice on July 14, killing 84 people and injuring 434. On July 16, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and called Bouhlel a “soldier of Islam.” President Hollande condemned the attack as an act of radical Islamic terrorism. PM Valls said the act of Islamic terrorism was designed to challenge “tolerance and secularism.” He also condemned any “scapegoating of Muslims, Islam, and immigrants,” highlighting that many “Muslim compatriots” were among the victims of the attack.

On May 24, a court ordered the chief suspect in a deadly attack on a Paris synagogue in 1980 to be sent back to jail, 10 days after he was released on bail. Hassan Diab, a Lebanese Canadian sociology professor who had been detained for 18 months, was accused of being part of the Special Operations branch of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP was blamed for the bombing on October 3, 1980 that left four dead and around 40 injured. Diab, 62, was extradited from Canada in November 2014 and charged with the attack. He maintained his innocence and denied he was a member of the PFLP. On May 12, a judge authorized his release on bail after ruling there was doubt over the “fundamental question” of whether he was in France on the day of the attack. His exwife had told investigators that he was in Beirut on September 28, 1980, despite stamps in his passport indicating that he was already in Europe. Diab was charged with murder, attempted murder and destruction of property as part of a terrorist enterprise. The date of the trial had not been set by year’s end.

On February 10, local media quoting a Jordanian judicial source reported the Jordanian Ministry of Justice rejected a 2015 French extradition request for two Jordan-based suspects in the August 1982 shooting attack at Goldenberg, a Jewish restaurant in Paris’ historically Jewish Marais district, that killed six people and wounded 22 others. Media identified suspects Zuhair Mohamad al-Abassi (aka Amjad Atta) and Nizar Tawfiq Hamada, 54. Jordanian authorities rejected the extradition request for Abassi because at the time the French government made it in February 2015, an extradition agreement between Jordan and France had not entered into force, according to the source. The agreement was signed in 2011, but did not come into force until July 2015. Jordanian authorities reported the request for Hamada was rejected because the statute of limitations concerning the criminal allegations against him had expired. French authorities stated they might try the suspects in absentia. No trial date had been set at year’s end.

The nationwide state of emergency, which the government originally declared following the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, was extended on February 19, May 20, July 21, and December 15 and was scheduled to continue until July 15, 2017. The state of emergency continued to give significantly expanded powers to the police and other state authorities. The government was allowed to dissolve associations deemed to be working towards the serious disruption of public order. Prefects in all regions were given the authority to order the provisional closure of concert halls, restaurants, or any public place. They were also granted authority to prohibit public demonstrations or gatherings, as they deemed appropriate. The state of emergency enjoyed widespread legislative and public support throughout the year. The National Assembly approved the most recent extension of the state of emergency in December by a large majority.

On November 3, then-Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve (before he became PM in December) ordered an end to the permanent deployment of guards at places of worship throughout the country that had been in place since the January 2015 terrorist attacks, but maintained permanent roving patrols. The decision was made public in a November 15 report issued by the independent AEF Global Security research agency at the directive of the interior ministry, which stated Cazeneuve made this decision due to resource concerns and the evolving threat environment, and to allow police forces to refocus on their core mission. During sensitive times, the agency reported, the Ministry of Interior would assign permanent patrols to maintain security at these sites. According to the report, guards belonging to the prefecture of police in the greater Paris area were not affected by the police shift. According to statistics released by Cazeneuve in January, 15,000 security forces were deployed to protect 1,000 mosques, 717 Jewish sites, and 178 Catholic sites throughout the country.

On October 4, Junior Minister for Relations with Parliament Jean-Marie Le Guen announced, in response to a question by a national assembly member, that since November 2015 authorities had closed nine “radical” mosques or prayer rooms under the state of emergency. Le Guen added that the Council of Ministers had also dissolved, under a provision of the internal security law, three Islamic associations “allegedly dedicated” to religious activity, for promoting radical ideology.

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of June 30, the penitentiary system employed 690 Catholic (760 in 2015), 349 Protestant (377 in 2015), and 217 Muslim (193 in 2015) chaplains. The most recent figures for chaplains from other groups were from January 2015, at which time there were 75 Jewish, 52 Orthodox,

111 Jehovah's Witness, and 10 Buddhist chaplains, as well as 50 chaplains representing other religious groups. In the general detainee visiting area, any visitor could bring religious objects to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues, but could not pray. Prisoners could pray individually in their cells, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments in which they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 19 cases of authorities interfering with the community's public proselytizing during the year and one case where officials refused to rent community centers for religious celebrations. On January 6 in the region of Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, the municipal police prevented the group's members from proselytizing on the grounds that a municipal decree prohibited this activity. On March 18 in Ile-de-France, the town mayor stopped Jehovah's Witnesses from participating in their community service activity and stated it was prohibited in his town. The president of the local association of Jehovah's Witnesses wrote a letter to the mayor, including a statement from a lawyer citing the law. No formal legal complaint was filed.

The Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and to Combat Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) continued to observe and analyze the activities of minority "sectarian" groups, including "new age" and other religious and "jihadist" groups, which it considered to constitute potential threats to public order, including what it termed radicalized jihadist groups or cults. MIVILUDES coordinated responses to abuses – which included psychological and sexual abuse as well as fraud – violations of law, and threats to public order, and provided assistance to victims of these groups. It continued to offer training to public service employees providing support to families touched by "radical jihadism."

According to the Ministry of Justice, the government issued 223 fines for violating the law prohibiting face coverings in public spaces and government buildings in 2015, a 40 percent decrease compared to the 397 fines issued in 2014.

On June 8, the Observatory for Secularism, a body comprised of 15 senior civil servants, parliamentarians, legal experts, and intellectuals who advise the government on the implementation of the "principle of secularism," released its third annual report evaluating secularism in schools, public spaces, and hospitals. The 400-page document analyzed religion's place during a year marked by terrorist attacks and heated debate on the influence of Muslim fundamentalist networks in the country. The report notably did not recommend legislating against the wearing of religious symbols – including headscarves – at universities. It noted that

economic and social crisis, insufficient mixing of different groups in certain neighborhoods and schools, and the international situation had led in some cases to “reinvented and radical religious practices.” It praised efforts by the ministries of education and interior to encourage greater social mixing and to pursue an open dialogue with religious groups.

On November 9, the Council of State, which had been asked to rule on whether city halls could install nativity scenes, decreed they were permissible in town halls and other public buildings if the intent was “cultural, artistic, or festive.”

On August 26, the highest administrative court, the Council of State, rejected the city of Villeneuve-Loubet’s ban on “clothes demonstrating an obvious religious affiliation worn by swimmers on public beaches.” In its ruling, the court stated, “no evidence was presented that risks of breaches against peace and good order existed on the beaches of Villeneuve-Loubert in relation with the clothes worn by certain people. Considering that such risks did not exist ... there are no sufficient legal grounds to justify the mayor’s order.” Several city mayors – including the mayor of Nice – dismissed the verdict and said they would continue to enforce bans on full-body swimwear at public beaches, but there were no additional reported cases of local governments enforcing the ban. In response to the swimwear controversy, head of the Foundation for Islam in France Jean-Pierre Chevenement tweeted that Muslims should be “discreet” in public. Speaking to journalists on November 7, Chevenement called on conservative Muslims to “try harder to integrate” into society.

On October 18, a 19-year-old French Muslim woman won a court order lifting a travel ban that she said was imposed due to her ultraconservative Salafist beliefs. The woman, who was raised Catholic and had converted to Islam two years earlier, stated she wished to go to Saudi Arabia to study, but her mother and authorities suspected her of wanting to joining ISIS. As a result, the government had banned her on antiterrorism grounds from traveling abroad. “I am a Salafist, but I am not Da’esh [ISIS]. There is a big difference,” she stated.

Citing security and sanitation concerns, in February authorities cleared the southern portion of the unsanctioned Calais refugee camp, which included the destruction of many makeshift shelters that refugees had constructed in the camp, including a church and mosque. The migrants affected by the demolition were moved to heated shipping container shelters in the northern part of the camp where one church and six mosques remained. According to uncorroborated press reports, some migrants and activists said authorities had told them the church and mosque

were not included in the demolition plans and would not be destroyed. After relocating all migrants from Calais, the government closed the remainder of the camp in October.

The Bordeaux-based Center for Action and Prevention Against Radicalization of Individuals (CAPRI) began operations in late 2015 with the aim of intervening with youth before they become radicalized and to provide opposing narratives to deconstruct extremist arguments and conspiracy theories. Funded by the central and local governments, CAPRI included participation by several local Islamic organizations, such as the Muslim Federation of the Gironde, and the Regional Councils of the Muslim Religion of Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes. It operated on a voluntary basis, with participants attending therapy or religious counseling sessions, often with members of their family. The cases treated were typically young people, converts to Islam in almost half of cases, who showed a sudden change in behavior, cut themselves off from friends, or had been found consuming jihadist information online.

The Ministry of Education continued to mandate nationwide courses and exams designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. It partnered with the NGO International League Against Anti-Semitism and Racism to educate students and teachers about anti-Semitism and racism by including more discussion of these topics in the national curriculum. Beginning in September 2015, the national curriculum mandated an additional 300 hours over the course of a pupil's academic career, from elementary school to high school, dedicated to "moral and civic education," including "issues of combating racism, anti-Semitism, prejudice, and all forms of discrimination." At the same time, the education ministry launched an online platform to provide training, teaching materials, and resources for teachers on issues of secularism, antidiscrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism. The education ministry also sponsored the Week of Education and Actions Against Racism and Anti-Semitism on March 21-28. The ministry created an interactive internet-based platform to highlight the nearly 200 projects and activities by youth, education, and cultural associations to prevent racism and anti-Semitism.

In collaboration with Catholic universities and local mosques, the Ministry of Interior continued to provide funding for an education program in Lyon, Paris, Strasbourg, and Aix-en-Provence aimed at providing students, including future clergy members, with a broad understanding of national legal, historical, and social norms on secularism and fostering integration. The program lasted one academic year, from September to June. Government officials collaborated with academic

specialists to create the curriculum. The training was open to high-level officials and clergy from all religious groups. Muslims continued to express the greatest interest in the program, which included French language training, since most imams came from abroad and did not speak the language, hindering communication with their congregations. Students were primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa.

On October 25, the European Parliament (EP) voted to lift the immunity of one of its members, National Front (FN) Party founder and former leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, opening the door for prosecution by authorities, who had requested the move. Prosecutors stated they wanted to put Le Pen on trial for comments he made in 2014 about several artists, including Jewish singer Patrick Bruel. In what was widely interpreted by the EP and media outlets as a reference to the crematory ovens used by the Nazis during World War II, Le Pen was recorded in a video saying, “Listen, we’ll just bake a batch [*fournée*] next time.”

In March during a television interview, Minister for Families, Children and Women's Rights Laurence Rossignol made remarks comparing Muslim women who choose to wear head coverings to American slaves who supported slavery. She also condemned retailers who sold product lines designed for Muslim women, saying these companies were “promoting the confinement of women’s bodies.” In response, the human rights NGO Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) and the Frantz Fanon Foundation called on their members to file a lawsuit against Rossignol for “racist insults.”

In October leader of the FN Marine Le Pen stated that, if elected president in April 2017, she would extend the current ban on all religious clothing and symbols in public places in order to defeat the advance of political Islam, because “the situation is too serious today.”

On January 5, during their annual New Year’s meeting, President Francois Hollande thanked a group of seven religious leaders, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist leaders, for what they were doing to “promote understanding between our citizens and to deter anyone who wants to promote a message of hate,” following a difficult year marked by terrorism and incidents of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim behavior. “While having different approaches, we participate in the same objective: to unite our country and contribute to peace,” he concluded. He thanked these communities for their efforts in combatting violent extremism, racism, and anti-Semitism and for their work in welcoming refugees.

On January 9, speaking at a ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of the killing of four Jewish victims in a terror attack outside a kosher supermarket, PM Manuel Valls said he regretted the large numbers of Jews emigrating to Israel.

President Hollande and government ministers condemned anti-Semitism and stated support for Holocaust education on many occasions, including the March 7 annual dinner hosted by the largest Jewish umbrella organization, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF); the March 19 commemoration of the fourth anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 27 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration; the June 1 French Judaism Day observance; and the July 21 anniversary of the Velodrome d'Hiver roundup of Jews during World War II.

During his address at the March 7 dinner, PM Valls said he understood Jews' fears amid heightened religious tension in the country after attacks by Islamic extremists in Paris the previous year. Valls expressed his "solidarity" with the country's Jewish community and strongly condemned anti-Semitism whether from the "far left" or the "far right." "Yes, Jews of France are afraid to wear the kippa, to go to the synagogue, to do shopping in a kosher market, to send their children to public school. That's a reality, and a reality we do not accept," Valls said.

On June 29-30 in Jerusalem, government representatives and Israeli counterparts held a second annual meeting of a bilateral working group on anti-Semitism, established after an Israeli request for more information on anti-Semitism efforts in France. The French delegation was led by then-Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights Patriziana Sparacino-Thiellay and included the head of DILCRAH and CRIF representatives. The meeting reviewed anti-Semitism programs and best practices.

President Hollande, PM Valls, and other senior government officials met regularly with leaders from the Muslim community, including Anouar Kbibeche, President of the French Council of Muslim Faith (CFCM). They strongly denounced anti-Muslim acts and stressed the government's commitment to combat acts of hatred directed against Muslims.

On January 10, during an "open mosque weekend" organized by the Muslim community on the one-year anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, President Hollande made a surprise visit to the Grand Mosque of Paris and had tea with its rector, Dalil Boubakeur, and CFCM President Kbibeche. Minister of the Interior

Cazeneuve also participated in the CFCM-organized outreach event, visiting a mosque north of Paris in the town of Saint-Ouen l'Aumone.

On July 31, PM Valls called for a “reconstruction of French Islam” and asked Muslims to help combat radicalism. He said, “France has strong ties with Islam... and because France invented secularism, France is the target of the Islamic State.” Valls stated that, despite the country’s strict law on secularism, the state was going to have to intervene to ensure Islam could coexist within the country. “Our country must show the world that Islam is compatible with democracy,” said Valls. He said the state should not have to deal with teaching theology, but insisted it needed to help create solid learning institutions, based on openness. For this to happen, Valls said “a pact” was needed with Muslims in which the republic would guarantee freedom of worship and Muslims would fight radicalization from within. “If Islam does not help the republic to fight for civil liberties, it will become increasingly difficult to ensure freedom of worship,” he said.

On August 1, Interior Minister Cazeneuve met with the leaders of the CFCM. They announced the ministry and CFCM would begin a new initiative to work together against jihadism, including a countermessaging campaign and additional training for French imams to combat radicalism. The initiative began in the fall.

On August 29, Interior Minister Cazeneuve hosted approximately 50 Muslim leaders in Paris to discuss the government’s 2015 decision to relaunch the Foundation for Islam in France. At the meeting, he appointed former Minister of the Interior Jean-Pierre Chevenement, a non-Muslim, as president of the foundation, which sparked controversy among Muslim community leaders. On December 8, the Ministry of Interior officially launched the Foundation for Islam in France, after the foundation’s advisory board met for the first time. The meeting was held at the National Assembly, led by Chevenement. The new foundation, officially under the umbrella of the MOI, was to focus on cultural initiatives, such as civic training of imams, support for Islamic cultural centers, promotion of events and conferences related to Islam, and support for the study of Islam as a discipline in French universities. Members of the advisory board included CFCM President Anouar Kbibech, writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, theologian Ghaleb Bencheikh, rector of the Lyon mosque Kamel Kabtane, and businesswoman Najoua Arduini-Elatfani. The government-controlled French National Railways, Paris Airports Authority, and National Real Estate Company were founding members of the foundation. The new foundation replaced a previous, largely inactive foundation from which it inherited approximately one million euros (\$1.05 million) for financing projects. The task of encouraging greater transparency in the

foreign sources of financing of Islamic institutions in France was to be undertaken by another organization, yet to be launched.

On March 21, the government opened the second meeting of its dialogue on the Muslim faith, held under the auspices of the interior ministry. The meeting was part of a plan the government announced after the Charlie Hebdo attacks to broaden its dialogue with Muslim communities. The closed-door meeting brought together 150 representatives of the Islamic faith and was devoted to the prevention of radicalization. Agenda topics for this meeting included: prevention and radicalization in prisons; countermessaging strategy to prevent radicalization; engaging youth in prevention efforts; and grassroots mobilization. In an opening speech, PM Valls said the government needed “a strong Islam” as a partner in the fight against radicalization. He recalled the “major responsibility” of Muslim representatives “to fight against the fundamentalist propaganda that inundates the social media.” In closing remarks, Interior Minister Cazeneuve hailed “the commitment to engagement that sincerely drives the Muslims of France” and pledged “the republic’s support.”

On December 12, the government opened the third meeting of its dialogue on the Muslim faith, again under the auspices of the interior ministry. Cazeneuve, newly appointed as PM, gave opening remarks. The meeting brought together 200 representatives of the French Muslim community. The topics discussed were related to the launch of the Foundation for Islam in France, primarily on the financing of Islam and on training for imams working in the country.

The government hosted 44 imams from Algeria to work temporarily in France to attend training to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism within Muslim communities. The government of Algeria paid the imams’ salaries while on their temporary assignment.

On September 13, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the second day of a summit sponsored by the NGOs Coexister and Human Rights First dedicated to the creation of coalitions and advocacy campaigns to counter hate speech including religious hate speech, on the internet and on social media.

On August 17, PM Valls announced that since 2012, the government had issued deportation orders for more than 80 “preachers of hate” or “pseudo-imams,” including 13 since the beginning of the year. Citing interior ministry sources, Valls said the government would issue additional deportation orders in coming months.

On August 17, President Hollande and Interior Minister Cazeneuve met Pope Francis at the Vatican. While no official statement was released, in comments to the press prior to the meeting, Hollande said he intended to thank Pope Francis for his “very comforting words” in the wake of the summer’s terrorist attacks in the country. Hollande also said he hoped to discuss the situation facing Christians in the Middle East, noting France was among the “protectors” of Christians in the region. Hollande emphasized the principle of national secularism means “protecting all religions...and ensuring the freedom to believe or to not believe,” on the condition that others’ rights were respected.

In March Mayor of Montpellier Philippe Saurel joined Mayors United against Anti-Semitism, an initiative calling on municipal leaders to publicly address and take concrete actions against anti-Semitism. Other cities with mayors participating in the initiative included Paris, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Nice, and Nancy.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were violent, including lethal, attacks and other religiously motivated incidents directed against Christians, Jews, and Muslims. According to government, Jewish and Muslim sources, the number of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts decreased from 2015. Jews continued to emigrate to Israel due to anti-Semitic sentiment throughout the country, according to Jewish leaders, but at a lower rate than in 2015. Representatives from the Jewish and Muslim communities, the Protestant Federation, and the Catholic Conference of Bishops took steps to condemn intolerance and promote interfaith dialogue. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

According to the Ministry of Interior, based on complaints filed with police, the number of anti-Muslim incidents (including threats and attacks) decreased by 58 percent to 182 cases, from 429 in 2015. Anti-Semitic incidents declined by 59 percent to 335 cases, from 808 in 2015. Anti-Christian incidents, however, increased by 17 percent to 949, compared with 810 in 2015. The Ministry of Interior stated the acts against Christian religious sites represented 90 percent of all attacks against places of worship, and that not all of these incidents had a religious

motivation. (399 were linked to vandalism, 191 to theft, 14 to Satanism, and 25 to anarchism.)

Both the National Observatory Against Islamophobia (ONCI), a part of the CFCM, and CCIF confirmed the ministry's statistics regarding a decrease in reported anti-Muslim acts in 2016 compared to 2015. The two organizations cautioned, however, against equating the decrease in reported acts with increased tolerance for Muslims. Instead, the ONCI pointed to "institutional discrimination in schools, by the police, and by local authorities" as cause for concern, while the CCIF highlighted that victims were "reticent" to report anti-Muslim acts due to a loss in confidence in the justice system. The CCIF warned that, by conflating fighting terrorism with promoting anti-Muslim policies, the state of emergency since the November 2015 attacks disproportionately targeted Muslims. The ONCI report stated anti-Muslim acts were mainly directed at mosques and women wearing veils and headscarves. ONCI stated that anti-Islamic hate speech on the internet had been growing since the July 14 attack in Nice.

In 2016, based on information provided by the interior ministry, ONCI reported 182 anti-Muslim incidents, comprised of 64 acts against Muslims and 118 verbal threats.

On July 26, Adel Kermiche and Abdel-Malik Nabil Petitjean attacked a Catholic church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, killing a priest, Father Jacques Hamel, by cutting his throat and seriously wounding a male worshipper during a Mass. Police shot and killed the two assailants. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, which was widely condemned by the local and national authorities and community and religious leaders. On July 26, President Hollande expressed support to Catholics and described the priest's death as a "desecration of the French Republic, which guarantees freedom of conscience."

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 28 cases where members were physically attacked during the year. On June 24 in Bordeaux, two Jehovah's Witnesses, Huguette Dias and Monique Labecot, were proselytizing door-to-door when a man approached them shouting insults. The man kicked Labecot in the back of the head and punched Dias in the face, which resulted in her falling and hitting her head on the ground. Dias died as a result of her injuries. Police arrested the perpetrator and placed him in the psychiatric unit of a prison pending legal proceedings. A judge of the Bordeaux court was investigating the case at year's end. The second victim, Monique Labecot, was scheduled to appear before the investigating judge

in early 2017. The assailant had not been formally charged and no trial date was set by year's end.

On January 11, a 15-year-old Turkish teenager of Kurdish origin stabbed a Jewish teacher with a machete in Marseille, wounding him slightly on the shoulder. The attack took place as the 35-year-old teacher, who was wearing a yarmulke, was on his way to work at the Franco-Hebraic Institute. Police arrested the assailant shortly after the incident. On January 13, authorities placed him in pretrial detention and charged him with "attempted murder on the grounds of religion and terrorist sympathizing." On March 2, 2017, the Paris juvenile court found the attacker guilty of terrorism, attempted murder, and anti-Semitism and sentenced him to seven years in prison. The incident sparked widespread debate among the country's Jewish leaders on whether they should advise Jews to refrain, for safety's sake, from wearing a yarmulke in public.

On March 5 in Paris, a 13-year-old boy wearing a yarmulke was attacked by three men who, according to the boy's description, appeared to be North African. The perpetrators shouted anti-Semitic slogans at the boy, such as "dirty Jew," took off his yarmulke, and beat him. The victim suffered bruises to the face and filed a complaint to the police. The independent anti-Semitism watchdog NGO National Bureau of Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism denounced and condemned the attack and urged police to make efforts to identify the attackers. Police had made no arrests by year's end.

On July 20, a Muslim man, while yelling "*Allahu Akbar*," stabbed a mother and her three young daughters near the commune of Lagne-Monteglin. The assailant, whom authorities charged with attempted murder, said he carried out the attack because he saw the father of the girls scratching his upper thigh in front of his wife.

On July 27, in an act of revenge one day after the killing of Father Jacques Hamel, a 33-year-old assailant in Barentin insulted, threatened, and hit a Senegalese Muslim man in his seventies. The victim's children and three NGOs filed a lawsuit. There was no update on the case by year's end.

According to statistics released by the NGO Jewish Agency for Israel, approximately 5,000 Jews emigrated from France to Israel during the year compared to 7,835 people in 2015. In total, 40,000 Jews emigrated since 2006, according to the agency. Some leaders in the Jewish community linked the continued emigration to anti-Semitism and violent acts against Jews. Commenting on the decline in emigration in 2016, the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel

office in Paris said emigration was not just a reaction to events in the country but was also a result of religious or political motivations. He also cited authorities' efforts to protect French Jews and the generalization of terror attacks to the population of the country as a whole, which "paradoxically" restored confidence among Jews, because they were not the only target. According to the agency's estimates released in December, 3,000 French Jews who had emigrated to Israel over the previous three years returned to France.

The annual report of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an advisory body to the prime minister, included the results of a poll conducted by the BVA Institute, a research and consulting company, on January 4-11, involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of more than 1,000 residents over the age of 18. According to the poll, 41 percent of the respondents believed Jews had more influence over finances in their country than other groups, and 20 percent thought Jews had too much power in France. According to the same poll, 34 percent of respondents had a negative image of Islam and 50 percent of them considered it a threat to national identity. The report also cited persistent societal rejection of Islamic religious practices such as praying and women wearing a veil.

According to a Pew Research survey in May, 85 percent of respondents had a very or mostly favorable opinion of Jewish people. According to the same poll, 67 percent of respondents had a very or mostly favorable opinion of Muslims.

An April IFOP poll, however, found that 68 percent of respondents believed Muslims were not well integrated into French society and 47 percent considered the presence of unintegrated Muslim communities to be a threat to the country's national identity. According to another IFOP/Fiducial poll conducted September 16-20, 56 percent of respondents considered "Islam is not compatible with the values of French society," which included the value of secularism and keeping religion out of the public sphere. The majority said they opposed outward symbols of Islam, such as women wearing a veil (63 percent) and the construction of mosques (52 percent), two highly politicized and controversial issues in France. The same poll found 53 percent of respondents agreed that Muslims were becoming the scapegoats of society's problems.

On April 20, hundreds of students participated in a "Hijab Day" at the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) in Paris, one of the country's most selective institutions of higher learning. The organizers of the event invited fellow students to cover their hair to "demystify" the headscarf and to end the stigma around those who wear them. Politicians and students criticizing the event charged the

participants were proselytizing. Sciences Po administrators stated it neither prohibited nor supported the event.

On April 30, fire destroyed a Muslim prayer hall in Corsica, according to media reports. According to Ajaccio's public prosecutor, the fire was probably a criminal act, based on hydrocarbon traces found inside the hall. No one was injured in the fire. President Hollande issued a statement on April 30 expressing his solidarity with the Muslims of Corsica and vowing a swift investigation, which was still ongoing at the end of the year.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on March 23 the local Chalons-en-Champagne branch of the labor union the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) organized a demonstration to protest a decision by the town's mayor to provide the Witnesses with the use of a community center free of charge for a religious ceremony on Good Friday. According to the Witnesses, a dozen CGT activists stood in front of the center and blocked access to it in a hostile manner. As a result, the mayor found another hall for the Jehovah's Witnesses to use for their commemoration.

In July the European Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion that Micropole, an information technology consultancy company, unlawfully discriminated against a Muslim woman whom it fired in 2009 for not complying with the company's request to remove her headscarf when meeting with clients. The final ruling was set to take place early in 2017.

In August the mayor of Colombes, a Paris suburb, ordered the owner of a halal market, who leased the space from the housing authority, to adhere to the terms of the lease and stock additional products, including alcohol and pork, to serve non-Muslim, as well as Muslim, customers. Authorities threatened to close the store if the owner did not comply. The owner said he was "merely catering to the demands of his customers." The mayor filed a lawsuit with the Paris court to try to close the store and the shop manager Soulemane Yalcin filed a countersuit to keep it open. The case had not been heard at year's end.

On June 23, Muslim and Jewish community leaders announced at the National Assembly they were forming a joint commission to protect the practice of religious slaughter, which they said was under threat. CFCM President Anouar Kbibeche said the joint committee would be "tasked with reviewing and working on the challenges common to both religions" in the face of attempts to limit the custom. Joel Mergui, president of the French Consistoire – the community organ

responsible for providing Jewish religious services – said attacks against ritual slaughter were making some Jews question their future in the country.

In June the Paris Criminal Court charged writer Alain Soral with a 12,000 euro (\$12,645) fine and a suspended prison sentence of six months for saying in a Facebook post in 2015 that the Nazis should have finished killing the Jews of Europe. A judge found Soral guilty of “justifying war crimes and crimes against humanity,” *Le Figaro* reported Tuesday. Soral had had multiple previous convictions for minimizing or mocking the Holocaust. The judge also ordered Soral to pay 2,000 euros (\$2,107) to the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism, which filed the complaint against Soral for his Facebook post.

On March 9, a Paris criminal court sentenced an activist to a two-month prison sentence for incitement to racial hatred and slander towards Jews following the publication of two messages on his Twitter account in April 2015. The tweets said Jews “were responsible for the killing of 30 million Christians in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1947;” and that “if Jewish people were not held accountable for their innumerable crimes, they would try to blame others.”

On July 28, the CFCM encouraged all Muslims in the country to attend their local Catholic church for Sunday Mass to express solidarity and sorrow with Christians after the terrorist killing of Father Hamel on July 26. According to press reports, Muslims across France answered the call, including more than 100 Muslims who were among the 2,000 attending a Mass at the cathedral of Rouen to pay tribute to the slain priest. Hundreds of people of many faiths marched together in towns across the country in tribute to Father Hamel on July 30, in solidarity and to reject terrorism associated with religion.

In January the CFCM called for an “open mosque weekend” across France, on the first anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Mosques throughout the country invited their non-Muslim neighbors in for tours, open prayer services, tea, and calligraphy courses over the weekend. The objective of the event, according to the CFCM, was to discuss Islam in a country shaken by jihadist attacks and to “create a convivial environment for the exchange of ideas between believers and their fellow citizens.” Of the 2,500 mosques in France, “several hundred” reportedly participated, although no official count was available. The CFCM called this “first open door a successful operation, both for the mosques and for the visitors” and said it would repeat the open house annually.

On March 18, the interfaith community held events in Toulouse and Montauban to commemorate the Jewish and military victims killed by Mohammed Merah in 2012. Interior Minister Cazeneuve attended the ceremony. During his speech, Cazeneuve renewed calls for Jews not to leave the country, stating, “France wants to hold French Jews close and not let them leave.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported 68 acts of vandalism, an increase from 57 in 2015. They did not provide details on the incidents.

On June 8, the remains of a boar were found in front of a mosque in Nice. Police arrested two individuals for vandalism. On October 12, a Nice criminal court sentenced them to 80 hours of community service, a fine of 1,000 euros (\$1,054) to be paid to a worship association, and a symbolic payment of one euro (\$1.05) to three NGOs who had brought civil action.

On October 11, a boar’s head and skin were discovered in front of the same mosque in Nice. The imam filed a lawsuit against an unnamed assailant and police opened an investigation that was still pending at the end of the year.

Jewish and Muslim communities held a series of interfaith dialogues on November 25-27, an annual event. Jews and Muslims, along with government and community leaders, gathered in 30 different places of worship to discuss belief systems, recent government actions, and religious activities in an effort to facilitate communication, religious tolerance, and understanding between the two groups.

The Council of Christian Churches, composed of 10 members from the Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Churches, and Armenian Apostolic Church, continued to serve as a forum for dialogue. One observer represented the Anglican Communion on the council.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference’s National Service for Relations with Islam, an organization for engagement with Muslims, hosted an annual training session on Islam in June to promote religious tolerance and understanding and maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy representatives as well as staff from the consulates general and the APPs met with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters, including at the interior ministry and its religious affairs

office and the foreign ministry's religious affairs office, to discuss religious tolerance, cooperation, addressing anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim actions, and the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism. On March 4 in Paris, the Deputy Secretary of State met over a working lunch with leaders of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths and with members of civil society engaged in interfaith dialogue to discuss relations among religious groups, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamic sentiment, and violent extremism and radicalization. In June the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited and engaged government and community leaders in discussions of anti-Semitism and racism. The senior advisor from the office of the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism met with government, religious, and community leaders to discuss anti-Semitism in September. On September 13, a senior embassy representative and members of the government participated in a workshop organized by local NGO Coexister and U.S. NGO Human Rights First to discuss how to build an inclusive society against online hatred and promote religious and ethnic tolerance. The same night, the embassy representative hosted a reception that brought together the workshop's participants – including NGO representatives and a senior foreign ministry representative – with other high-level government representatives as well as representatives from civil society, technology companies, and religious communities.

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim acts, and interfaith dialogue and tolerance with private citizens, senior representatives from major religious groups, and NGOs, and hosted meetings with the CRIF, the CFCM, and Catholic priests working on interfaith dialogue.

Embassy officials met with interfaith leaders regularly to address issues facing both the Jewish and Muslim communities. The embassy met with Muslim community leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and concerns over radicalization and to advocate tolerance for diversity. The Ambassador hosted iftars in June attended by leaders of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, in which she emphasized U.S. support for interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and nondiscrimination. In October a senior embassy official attended a Yom Kippur observance with the Jewish community, where she expressed support for the Jewish community and for religious freedom and tolerance.

In March the U.S. Special Representative to Muslim Communities conducted a series of meetings and engagements with Muslim youth and community leaders,

discussing inclusion, identity issues, and community activism to promote equal rights for minority and underserved religious communities.

The embassy awarded small grants to various local NGOs to support projects aimed at furthering tolerance and coexistence, including a program to provide young people from diverse backgrounds with skills and tools to combat anti-Muslim sentiment and a program to enable young people from diverse religious backgrounds to explore issues of religious tolerance with U.S. counterparts.

Two prominent interfaith advocates received prestigious Department of State awards recognizing their efforts to advance religious freedom, which received broad and positive press coverage in the country. Samuel Grzybowski, founder of the innovative interfaith nongovernmental organization Coexister, was the recipient of the Emerging Young Leaders Award. French Moroccan interfaith activist Latifa Ibn Ziaten – mother of Imad ibn Ziaten, the first soldier Mohamed Merah killed in Toulouse in 2012 – won the International Women of Courage Award.

Staff from the consulates general and the APPs met with members of religious communities, including local imams, representatives from the Muslim Federation, local grand rabbis, regional CRIF presidents, and representatives of the Christian communities (Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant) in Strasbourg, Marseille, Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux, and Lyon in order to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. During these meetings, they discussed relations between Muslim and Jewish communities, the development and current status of the CAPRI program to assist Muslim youth at risk of radicalization, and how to increase knowledge and tolerance of minority religious communities. The embassy sponsored a program in the United States on interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance for the Rabbi of Toulouse, a Marseille imam, and the Strasbourg-based director of the museum commemorating the victims of the only Nazi internment camp in the country.

In January staff from APP Rennes met with local Muslim community leaders, including Ait Lahbib, the President of a local Muslim youth association, to discuss religious tolerance and promoting interfaith understanding. In October staff from the APP in Bordeaux took part in a panel discussion on the separation of church and state as part of the City Hall of Bordeaux's Two Weeks of Equality series. The annual event aimed at celebrating diversity and promoting tolerance, including religious tolerance.