

SPAIN 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and states the government shall consider the religious beliefs of society and form cooperative relations with the Roman Catholic Church and other religious faiths. The government has a bilateral agreement with the Holy See that grants the Catholic Church additional benefits not available to three other groups with which the government has agreements: Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. Groups without agreements may register with the government and receive some benefits. Various politicians and civil society actors continued to criticize compulsory religious education, which is under the control of regional governments. The Ministry of Justice's (MOJ) 2017 annual report on religious freedom cited concerns regarding unequal treatment of religious groups, different financing of religious assistance, difficulties in opening places of worship, proselytizing, and providing spiritual services in public institutions, and the inability of the state to respond to religiously motivated incidents. Between January and September the government granted citizenship to approximately 4,000 descendants of Jews expelled in 1492. Muslims, Jews, and especially Buddhists reported problems with cemetery access. Leaders of other religious groups said the state allowed citizens to allocate part of their taxes to the Catholic Church or its charities but not other religions. The government continued outreach to Muslims to combat religious discrimination and promote integration.

There were incidents of assaults, threats, incitement to violence, other hate speech, and vandalism against Christians, Muslims and Jews. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Observatory for Religious Freedom and Conscience (OLRC) reported 142 religiously motivated incidents – including two assaults – in the first nine months of the year, 20 more than in the same period in 2017. Of the 142 cases, 65 percent were against Christians. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) documented 103 hate crimes with religious motivations in 2017, compared with 47 in 2016. The NGO Citizens' Platform against Islamophobia reported 546 anti-Muslim incidents in 2017, of which hate speech on the internet accounted for 70 percent. The MOJ reported 43 hospitals throughout the country denied treatment to Jehovah's Witnesses who refused blood transfusions. Christians, Muslims, and Jews reported increased hostility against them in media.

U.S. embassy and consulate officials met regularly with the MOJ's Office of Religious Affairs, as well as with regional governments' offices for religious affairs and with religious leaders who participated in the governmental Pluralism

and Coexistence Foundation (the Foundation). Topics discussed included anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anticlerical sentiment, the failure of some regional governments to comply with legal requirements to treat religious groups equally, concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities, access to religious education and cemeteries for religious groups, and pensions for clergy. In January the embassy hosted religious leaders for a discussion on religious freedom and equality in the country. In June the Ambassador hosted an iftar focused on strengthening government engagement with, and inclusion of, the Muslim community. In May the Consulate General in Barcelona organized an iftar where Muslim leaders and public officials discussed ways of promoting religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 49.3 million (July 2018 estimate). According to a survey conducted in April by the governmental Center for Sociological Research, 67.4 percent of respondents identified themselves as Catholic and 2.6 percent as followers of other religious groups. In addition, 15.6 percent described themselves as “nonbelievers” and 12.2 percent as atheists; the remaining 2.3 percent did not answer the question.

The (Catholic) Episcopal Conference of Spain estimates there are 32.6 million Catholics. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) estimates there are 1.7 million Protestants, 900,000 of whom are immigrants. The Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE), the largest member organization of the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE), estimates there are 1.9 million Muslims, while other Muslim groups estimate a population of up to two million. According to the MOJ’s 2017 report on religious freedom, citing estimates by religious groups, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE) estimates there are 45,000 Jews; the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly stated in 2014 there were 1.5 million Orthodox Christians; the Jehovah’s Witnesses report 188,000 members; the Federation of Buddhist Communities estimates there are 85,000 Buddhists; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) cites 57,000 members. Other religious groups include Christian Scientists, other Christian groups, Baha’is (12,000 members), Scientologists (11,000 members), and Hindus. The autonomous communities of Catalonia, Andalusia, and Madrid and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa contain the highest percentage of non-Christians, nearly 50 percent in the latter two cities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and guarantees freedom of religion and worship for individuals and communities; it allows limits on expression if “necessary to maintain public order.” According to the Foundation, reasons would include overcrowding in small facilities or public spaces. The Foundation provides funding in support of activities and projects that promote cultural, educational, and social integration among religious denominations that have a cooperation agreement with the state. The Foundation also promotes dialogue and rapprochement among religious groups and the normalization of religion in society. A law restricts unauthorized public protest, but authorities have not used it or the constitutional limits on expression against religious groups.

The constitution states no one may be compelled to testify about his or her religion or beliefs. The constitution also states, “No religion shall have a state character,” but “public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and consequently maintain appropriate cooperative relations with the Catholic Church and other denominations.” The Catholic Church is the only religious group explicitly mentioned in the constitution.

The government does not require religious groups to register, but registering confers religious groups with certain legal benefits. Groups registered in the MOJ’s Registry of Religious Entities have the right to autonomy; may buy, rent, and sell property; and may act as a legal entity in civil proceedings. Registration entails completing forms available on the MOJ’s website and providing notarized documentation of the foundational and operational statutes of the religious group, its legal representatives, territorial scope, religious purposes, and address. Any persons or groups have the right to practice their religion whether or not registered as a religious entity.

Registration with the MOJ and *notorio arraigo* (“deeply rooted” or permanent) status allows groups to establish bilateral cooperation agreements with the state. The government has a bilateral agreement with the Holy See, executed in part by the Episcopal Conference. The government also has cooperation agreements with FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE. These agreements are legally binding and provide the religious groups with certain tax exemptions, the ability to buy and sell property, open a house of worship, and conduct other legal business; grant civil validity to the weddings they perform; and permit them to place teachers in schools and

chaplains in hospitals, the military, and prisons. Groups with cooperation agreements are also eligible for independently administered government grants.

The agreement with the Holy See covers legal, educational, cultural, and economic affairs; religious observance by members of the armed forces; and the military service of clergy and members of religious orders. The later cooperative agreements with FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE cover the same issues.

Registered groups who wish to sign cooperative agreements with the state must acquire *notorio arraigo* status through the MOJ. To achieve this status, groups must have an unspecified “relevant” number of followers; a presence in the country for at least 30 years; and a “level of diffusion” that the MOJ considers demonstrates a “social presence” but is not further defined. Groups must also submit documentation demonstrating the group is religious in nature to the MOJ’s Office of Religious Affairs, which maintains the Register of Religious Entities.

The Episcopal Conference deals with the government on behalf of the entire Catholic community. Per the state’s 1979 agreement with the Holy See, individual Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register with the government. In addition to FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Federation of Buddhist Communities (FCBE), Church of Jesus Christ, and Orthodox Church are registered religions with *notorio arraigo* status. New religious communities may register directly with the MOJ, or religious associations may register on their behalf.

If the MOJ considers an applicant for registration not to be a religious group, the group may be included in the Register of Associations maintained by the MOI. Inclusion in the Register of Associations grants legal status but offers no other benefits. Registration itself simply lists the association and its history in the government’s database. Registration as an association is a precursor to requesting that the government deem the association to be of public benefit, which affords the same tax benefits as charities, including exemption from income tax and taxes on contributions. For such a classification, the association must be registered for two years and maintain a net positive fiscal balance.

The government funds religious services within the prison system for Catholic and Muslim groups. Examples of religious services include Sunday Catholic Mass, Catholic confession, and Friday Islamic prayer. The cooperation agreements of FCJE and FEREDE with the government do not include this provision; these groups provide religious services in prisons but at their own expense. Other

religious groups registered as religious entities with the MOJ may provide services at their own expense during visiting hours upon the request of prisoners.

The Regions of Madrid and Catalonia have agreements with several religious groups that have accords with the national government. These regional agreements permit activities such as providing religious assistance in hospitals and prisons under regional jurisdiction. The central government funds these services for prisons and the military, and the regional governments fund hospital services. According to the MOJ, these subnational agreements may not contradict the principles of the federal agreements, which take precedence. The Catalan government has agreements with Catholics, FEREDE, and CIE. The Madrid Region has agreements with Catholics, FEREDE, FCJE, and CIE.

The government guarantees religious workers of groups with cooperative agreements with the state access to refugee centers, known as foreign internment centers, so that these groups may provide direct assistance, at the groups' expense, to their followers in the centers. According to the MOJ, other religious practitioners may enter the internment centers upon request.

Military rules and prior signed agreements allow religious military funerals and chaplain services for Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims, should the family of the deceased request it. Other religious groups may conduct religious funerals upon request.

The government recognizes marriages performed by all religious communities with *notorio arraigo* status.

Religious groups must apply to local governments for a license to open a place of worship, as with other establishments intended for public use. Requirements for licenses vary from municipality to municipality. The MOJ states documentation required is usually the same as for other business establishments seeking to open a venue for public use and includes information such as architectural plans and maximum capacity. Religious groups must also inform the MOJ after opening new places of worship.

Local governments are obligated to consider requests for use of public land to open a place of worship. If a municipality decides to deny such a request after weighing factors such as availability and value added to the community, the city council must explain its decision to the requesting party.

As outlined in agreements with religious groups, the government provides funding for salaries for teachers of Catholic and, when at least 10 students request it, Protestant and Islamic classes in public schools. The Jewish community is also eligible for government funding for Jewish instructors but has declined it. The courses are not mandatory. Those students who elect not to take religious education courses are required to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes. The development of curricula and the financing of teachers for religious education is the responsibility of the regional governments, with the exception of Andalusia, Aragon, the Canary Islands, Cantabria, and the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, which leave the curricula and financing of education to the national government in accordance with their individual regional statutes.

Autonomous regions generally have the authority to develop the requirements for religious education instructors and certify their credentials, although some choose to defer to the national government. For example, prospective instructors must provide personal data, proof that the educational authority of the region where they are applying to work has never dismissed them, a degree as required by the region, and any other requirement as stipulated by the religious association to which they correspond. The religious associations are required to provide a list of approved instructors to the government. MOE-approved CIE guidelines stress “moderate Islam” in worship practices, with emphasis on plurality, understanding, religious tolerance, conflict resolution, and coexistence. CIE also requires instructors to have a certificate of training in Islamic education.

Catholic clergy may include time spent on missions abroad in calculations for social security, and claim retirement pension credit for a maximum of 38.5 years of service. Protestant clergy are eligible to receive social security benefits, including health insurance and a government-provided retirement pension with a maximum credit of 15 years of service, but pension eligibility requirements for these clergy are stricter than for Catholic clergy. The law allows Protestant clergy to count towards retirement time worked prior to 1999, the date of a prior decree, only if these clergy adjusted their status in 1999, and does not allow Protestant clergy to claim retirement credit for time worked abroad. Protestant clergy must also pay unfunded pension contributions in one lump sum rather than via monthly salary deductions, as Catholic clergy do. Clergy from the Russian Orthodox Church, CIE, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are also eligible for social security benefits. The benefits for clergy from these groups depend on the specific terms of separate social security agreements that each of these groups negotiated with the state.

The penal code definition of hate crimes includes acts of “humiliation or disrespect” against victims because of their religion, with penalties of one to four years in prison. Under the penal code, it is a crime to prevent or disrupt religious services and to offend, scorn or blaspheme religious beliefs, ceremonies, or practitioners. Those who do not profess any religion or belief are also protected under the penal code. By law, authorities may investigate and prosecute criminal offenses committed by neo-Nazi groups as “terrorist crimes.” Genocide denial is a crime if it incites violent attitudes, such as aggressive, threatening behavior or language.

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

Government Practices

According to the MOJ’s report on religious freedom, the Church of Jesus Christ and the FCBE both said they were unable to conclude agreements with the government and therefore were excluded from the benefits available to the Catholic Church and the three other religious groups with such agreements. The Church of Jesus Christ said it had been trying unsuccessfully for years to obtain an agreement, and the FCBE expressed regret that the state had for many years denied agreements to other religious groups with *notorio arraigo* status.

Some religious minorities, such as FEREDE, FCJE, and the Church of Jesus Christ, called for improved and equal access for religious groups providing spiritual services at public institutions, such as hospital, prisons, and the military. FEREDE also sought government reimbursement for the cost of providing such services, in the same way the government did for the Catholic Church. FEREDE welcomed the state’s decision to house Protestant chapels and ministers in some military bases, although it criticized the lengthy delays and lack of attention the issue received from the government. FCJE, CIE, and FEREDE welcomed the decision to allow religious observance in prisons but also considered it necessary to standardize prisoners’ access to religious services so that it would be on a par with other basic services.

According to the MOJ’s report on religious freedom, several groups cited local government restrictions on their ability to proselytize or manifest their faith in public spaces. FEREDE stated municipalities often imposed fines or other sanctions on members who distributed religious pamphlets or engaged in other religious activities in public areas, although the central government owned the land. According to FEREDE, there was a growing tendency of local authorities to

silence religious groups and expel them from the public space. Jehovah's Witnesses cited 37 municipalities where there were unresolved issues involving restrictions on the use of public spaces for religious activities. The Church of Jesus Christ said its missionaries had occasionally encountered restrictions in posting placards in public or establishing booths at public fairs.

In September authorities detained and questioned actor Willy Toledo after he refused to appear in court to respond to allegations of offending religion for making insulting remarks in 2017 about God and the Virgin Mary. In May and June Toledo had refused to answer questions before a judge about the charges, which were filed by the Spanish Association of Christian Lawyers, and said he would continue to "make mockery." The lawyers' association reportedly broadened its complaint against Toledo to incitement to hatred after he said, "Ultra-Catholics should disappear from the face of the earth," and, according to the association, justified crimes against Catholic clergy during the Spanish Civil War by stating on television, "The churches and priests must have done something to be burned."

In March Member of Parliament Enric Bataller of the Compromis Party introduced a bill to remove from the penal code the crime of offending religion. According to the draft bill, the existing provision of the code contradicted "the constitutional rights that guarantee freedom of expression and the nonconfessional character of the state."

Several religious groups, especially Protestant ones, said burdensome and unequal regulations remained a principal obstacle to religious groups seeking licenses or permits for places of worship. For example, FEREDE Executive Secretary Mariano Blazquez cited a requirement in several municipalities that there be at least 500 meters (1640 feet) separating one place of worship from another, which disproportionately affected non-Catholic denominations due to the prevalence of Catholic churches. Groups said other restrictions, such as requirements that religious centers maintain the same level of acoustic insulation as nightclubs, were excessively expensive and technically difficult to fulfill.

According to the MOJ, Protestant groups built 197 new places of worship in the country between December 2017 and December 2018, bringing the total to 4,238, or 58.5 percent of all non-Catholic places of worship.

Other religious groups cited similar concerns in the government's report on religious freedom. CIE stated municipal urban planning restricted the opening of

places of worship in city centers, forcing them to move to city outskirts. Jehovah's Witnesses cited long delays of up to one year after approval of construction for a place of worship until authorities issued a permit to begin work.

According to the MOJ's report on religious freedom, Muslim and Buddhist communities reported problems with accessing and establishing cemeteries. FCBE said no Buddhist cemeteries or specific places to deposit remains according to Buddhist tradition existed in the country, and there was no interest on the part of municipalities to address the issue. CIE expressed the need for a place of burial in each one of the Balearic and Canary Islands. In addition, CIE reported only the autonomous communities of Andalusia and Valencia and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla allowed coffinless burials. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) stated the country had 28 public cemeteries with specific plots for Muslims.

The Jewish community also cited a need to obtain more space in cemeteries, where it could carry out burials in accordance with Jewish customs. Despite existing agreements between FCJE and Valencia and Alicante under which the cities were to provide Jewish cemeteries, the projects remained pending at year's end.

In May pamphlets featuring People's Party Leader in Catalonia and former Badalona Mayor Xavier Garcia Albiol, in which Garcia Albiol called for blocking the construction of an Islamic prayer room in the Artigues neighborhood of Badalona, circulated in the city. Then-Badalona Mayor Dolors Sabater said her administration was considering charging Garcia Albiol with a hate crime but did not do so.

FCJE Director Carolina Aisen said implementation of the law allowing descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country in 1492 to gain citizenship continued to run smoothly. According to Aisen, who said she met monthly with the MOJ to discuss progress, 4,000 Sephardi descendants obtained citizenship between January and September, and approximately 18,000 Sephardis had started the application process. The bulk of applicants continued to come from Venezuela; others came from Israel, other countries in Latin America, and the United States. The Jewish community said burdensome financial and administrative requirements, such as a requirement to self-fund a trip to the country for the personal interview, reduced the response to the law. Aisen said the sharp rise in applications for citizenship was likely due to concerns the law would expire in 2019.

The FCJE estimated there were very few survivors of the Holocaust residing in the country and said this was why the government only considered restitution on a case-by-case basis. The FCJE reported no restitution cases during the year.

The MOJ's report on religious freedom cited complaints by several religious groups, including the Catholic Church, FEREDE, FCJE, and CIE, about obstacles to providing religious education and the integration of religious teachers in schools. The Catholic Church said some autonomous communities failed to provide students or their parents sufficient information on the possibility of pursuing religious studies, or placed barriers to the teaching of such classes, in violation of the government's accord with the Holy See. FEREDE stated many localities did not offer Protestant classes, and parents often were unable even to request such classes. After protracted efforts by the Protestant community, according to the report, the autonomous community of La Rioja began to offer religious classes for Protestants in schools, as did Huesca Province; however, the autonomous community of Valencia had not responded to the requests for such classes by more than 700 students.

Religious groups said there was also a continuing lack of information on classes or enrollment options for students. CIE cited a similar lack of information and enrollment options for students and reported that only six autonomous communities and Ceuta and Melilla had Islamic studies educators, despite the existence of eligible instructors in every region. In the Basque Country, there were reports some schools had called in parents to discourage them from seeking Islamic classes for their children.

There were no Jewish classes in public schools, and FCJE reported schools were usually unaware of Jewish holidays provided for in the accord between FCJE and the state. The Church of Jesus Christ proposed the right of religious education in public schools be extended to all religious groups with *notorio arraigo* status, not just to groups with agreements with the state.

In February the Education Commission of the national parliament approved a nonbinding resolution introduced by members of the Valencia-based Compromis Party and Together We Can (Unidos Podemos), a coalition of left-wing political parties, calling on the government to eliminate religion from the public school curriculum. The draft resolution, which parliament did not vote on, also called for the repeal of the government's agreements with the Holy See and with other religious groups.

In June the Regional Parliament of Navarre approved a nonbinding resolution calling on the federal government to “denounce the accords between Spain and the Holy See,” with a view to establish a secular education system in public schools.

In July the Federation of Associations of Fathers and Mothers of Students in the Province of Castellon (FAMPA) said it was receiving complaints from parents of students in schools selected to teach Muslim students classes on Islam. FAMPA head Silvia Centelles said the organization had always favored doing away with teaching religion in classes and that parents said they could not understand how education officials could be in favor of teaching “the Islamic religion in classes, a religion that denigrates women and relegates them to second-class status.”

In January the Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras), the country’s largest labor union, called for the elimination of religion from public schools and an education “free of the dogmatism of the Catholic Church.” In February the teachers’ union of Castilla La Mancha called for a reduction in class hours dedicated to teaching religion to the minimum required by law until national norms were changed towards establishing secular public schools. According to a statement by the union, religion as a subject matter was neither a science nor an art and did not merit inclusion in public schools; rather it served to spread Catholic doctrine and only distorted the normal functioning of students’ education, taking beliefs from the private to the public space, where they did not belong in a nonconfessional society.

Holocaust education in secondary school curricula continued to expand in accordance with an MOE mandate contained in two existing royal decrees. The subject was included in fourth-year compulsory geography and history class and first-year contemporary world history class. In 2017, the FCJE signed an agreement with the MOE to train teachers on the Holocaust, Judaism, and anti-Semitism.

In December the state-supported cultural center Centro Sefarad Israel organized a trip to Berlin for approximately 15 Spanish teachers to learn about the Wannsee Conference, the meeting at which Nazi officials planned the Holocaust. The trip included lectures and a tour of a concentration camp. Centro Sefarad Israel organized dozens of lectures and courses throughout Spain on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, bringing speakers from around the world to speak to groups of teachers and other instructors.

Despite a 2017 Supreme Court ruling making government pension eligibility requirements for Protestant clergy the same as those for Catholic priests, no Protestant clergy had yet begun receiving a government pension because the ruling was not retroactive. FEREDE asked the government to issue a royal decree to allow retired Protestant clergy to collect pensions from their time in service prior to 1999 and to allow survivor benefits for spouses and children of clergy.

The Catholic Church remained the only religious entity to which persons could voluntarily allocate 0.7 percent of their taxes. Other religious groups were not listed on the tax form as potential recipients of funds. Several religious groups, including Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ, continued to express their desire to have their groups included on the tax form so they could be eligible to receive the 0.7 percent allocation from taxpayers. The tax designation yielded 267.8 million euros (\$307 million) in donations to the Catholic Church during the year, according to news reports.

Representatives of FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE stated they did not receive all of the benefits to which they were entitled under their cooperative agreements with the government. As an example, they cited their inability to make use of the same tax allocation financing system that the Catholic Church used.

Many religious groups, such as FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE, said that they relied on government funds, provided through the Foundation, to cover their administrative and infrastructure costs. According to the MOJ's report on religious freedom, CIE indicated its interest in changing the Foundation's system of assigning funds that supported Islamic communities so that funds could be used to support several communities that stopped receiving other forms of assistance. FCBE, which is not a participant in the Foundation, said that it did not receive any public funding and expressed its desire to receive such assistance in the future. FEREDE proposed the government increase tax deductions for donations to religious groups so that these groups could better self-finance their operations. Religious representative bodies, such as FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE received funding from the Foundation to cover administrative and infrastructure costs. During the year FEREDE received 356,000 euros (\$408,000), FCJE received 169,362 euros (\$194,000), and CIE received 255,000 euros (\$292,000). The Foundation also provided 120,000 euros (\$138,000) in small grants to dozens of local religious associations for educational and cultural projects aimed at promoting religious integration.

In May the regional government of Navarre became the first of the 17 autonomous communities to endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement

against Israel, approving a nonbinding declaration calling on the central government to “support any initiative promoted by the international BDS campaign” and “suspend relations with Israel until that country stops its criminal and repressive policies against the Palestinian population.” The measure did not stipulate any actions the Navarre government should take in support of BDS other than its appeal to the central government.

As of June approximately 100 local, municipal, or provincial governments had passed resolutions supporting the BDS movement, including Valencia, the country’s third largest city, although court rulings had voided more than a dozen of these resolutions after the attorney general for hate crimes began investigations in 2017 to determine possible criminal responsibility of municipalities that supported the BDS movement. For example, in June the High Court in the province of Asturias found that the city of Castrillon’s policy of boycotting Israel was unconstitutional. In August the municipalities of Sagunto and Villarrobledo reversed prior statements in support of BDS after the local NGO Action and Communication on the Middle East threatened a lawsuit. The NGO Lawfare Project said that, as of June, its litigation fund had secured 58 court victories against BDS campaigns in the country.

In December the interagency Religious Freedom Advisory Committee, led by Minister of Justice Dolores Delgado, held plenary and standing committee sessions to review issues pertaining to religious freedom in the country. The committee reviewed the status of religious freedom, noted issues of concern, and approved the MOJ’s 2017 report on religious freedom. The committee comprised representatives from various government offices, academics, and religious leaders from the Catholic Church, FEREDE, FCJE, CIE, Church of Jesus Christ, Federation of Buddhist Communities, and Orthodox Church. The committee had seven working groups to address specific religious issues, including approval of the MOJ’s annual report on the status of religious freedom in the country.

The city of Barcelona continued to implement its “Plan of Action against Islamophobia.” As part of the plan, the city’s Office for Nondiscrimination launched a communications campaign in partnership with Muslim communities to sensitize the population to anti-Muslim sentiment and its impact. The city hall led training events on human rights and diversity, including religious tolerance, to municipal employees, as well as to more than 1,500 children. The office also provided legal, social, and psychological assistance to victims of discrimination, including religious discrimination.

In August the Foundation signed an agreement with the Madrid municipal police to protect the religious freedom of members of the police force by coordinating on research and development of new methodologies to manage a religiously diverse police force.

According to the MOJ's report on religious freedom, FEREDE and FJCE again called for greater neutrality on the part of the national and local governments in conducting official activities. They cited the organization of Catholic state funerals and the participation of government officials in acts or ceremonies of a particular religious group as evidence of a lack of neutrality.

In May the Rioja Provincial Parliament approved a nonbinding resolution calling on the provincial government to give proof of institutional secularism as a "public reflection of real neutrality and respect for diverse religious beliefs." In particular, the resolution asked the government to ensure that public ceremonies in which members of the provincial executive branch participated were secular.

In May the Barcelona High Court upheld the 2017 conviction and six-month prison sentence of Barcelona bookstore owner Pedro Varela for intellectual property crimes for selling *Mein Kampf* without authorization. Varela was released on two-year's probation after serving one month of his sentence. Authorities continued to investigate Varela on charges of selling books promoting religious hatred or discrimination, and his bookstore remained closed.

Movement Against Intolerance, a nonreligiously affiliated NGO that compiles instances of religiously motivated hate crimes, criticized government and religious leaders for not working together to combat all forms of religious intolerance. Director Esteban Ibarra again stated authorities should apply the criminal code pertaining to religiously motivated crimes more widely and that public prosecutors and police remained unprepared to combat religious intolerance. Ibarra also pointed to a lack of preventive education in schools. In addition, FEREDE proposed the government create a hotline for victims of religious persecution and hate crimes.

According to Ibarra, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment were on the rise, partly due to the actions of some members of political parties on the far left and right, such as Podemos and Vox. Ibarra said that, although membership in ultra-right parties remained small, such parties had gradually expanded their online and public presence over the previous year, including through public meetings, marches, and statements in the press. Ibarra stated the support for BDS policies

among some members of parties like Podemos contributed to the further isolation of Israel and an increase in anti-Semitism.

During an appearance on Catalan public television, Bel Olid, a writer and activist affiliated with the far-left CUP (Catalan Popular Unity Candidacy) Party, encouraged participation in the March 8 International Women's Day demonstrations by calling for the burning of the Episcopal Conference for being sexist and patriarchal.

The Foundation provided training on preventing anti-Islamic sentiment and other religious discrimination and organized an event with the Canada Foundation and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces on reducing violent religious extremism. The Foundation hosted a seminar with members of the Baha'i Faith on preventing violent radicalization.

According to the MOJ's report on religious freedom, FEREDÉ asked the government to adjust its visa policies for foreign religious workers in recognition that spouses and minor children might accompany Protestant clergy.

The Office of Religious Affairs continued to maintain an online portal for information on registered minority religious groups to aid new immigrants or citizens moving into a community to find his or her locally registered religious community and place of worship. The MOJ stated the tool provided no personally identifiable information and complied with the information protection law.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Observatory for Religious Freedom and Conscience (OLRC), there were 142 incidents that it described as violating religious freedom in the first nine months of the year, 20 more than in the same period in 2017. Of the incidents, 92 targeted Christians (including 79 against Catholics), 10 were against Muslims, five against Jews, and 35 classified as against all faiths. There were two incidents of violence, 33 attacks on places of worship, 42 cases of harassment, and 65 cases of public marginalization of religion. As described in the report, many incidents had political as well as religious motivations. Some involved protests of government actions perceived as favoring or disfavoring religious groups or were declarations or resolutions by civil society groups or political parties calling for the

cessation of religion classes in schools, a strict separation of religion and state, or a renegotiation of the government's agreement with the Holy See.

The MOI reported 103 hate crimes based on religious beliefs or practices and, separately, six motivated by anti-Semitism in 2017, the most recent year for which data were available, compared with 47 and seven such crimes, respectively, in 2016. Half of the anti-Semitic crimes and 43 percent of the other religiously motivated crimes reported in 2017 occurred in Catalonia. The MOI's report did not cite specific examples or provide a breakdown of religiously motivated incidents by type of crime.

The Citizens' Platform against Islamophobia reported 546 anti-Muslim incidents in 2017. The NGO said that, because its methodology had changed, this figure should not be compared to the 573 incidents in 2016. Of the total reported cases, which it said represented "only the tip of the iceberg," 386 incidents were media or internet based, while 48 percent comprised verbal insults or derogatory statements against Islam and Muslims. Incidents occurred most often in Catalonia (51), Andalucia (22), Valencia (20) and Madrid (17). The NGO said it believed the large number of incidents in Catalonia was related to August 2017 terrorist attacks. The government characterized these attacks as "jihad terrorism." According to the NGO, the targets were Muslims and Islam in general, women (21 percent), children (7 percent), and mosques (7 percent). The most frequent type of incidents after online hate speech, it reported, was discrimination against women wearing hijabs, at 21 percent.

According to the OLRC report, in one violent incident in March, a Moroccan man attacked and insulted a Moroccan woman in Lorca because of what he said was her attire and demeanor in public. The woman reportedly suffered minor injuries. Police arrested the suspected perpetrator, who had allegedly threatened the woman on other occasions. In the other violent incident OLRC cited, in August police arrested two men described as leftist extremists after they allegedly attacked a group of youths wearing t-shirts of a Catholic university in Murcia. One of the attackers hit a youth on the head with a bottle, causing an ocular hemorrhage.

In August in Mataro, Barcelona Province, the Civil Guard detained two Moroccan men allegedly involved with recruiting individuals to join ISIS. According to press reports, the detainees had posted on the internet that their objective was "to kill all Jews."

The attacks against places of worship the OLRC report cited included not only vandalism, but also threats and incitement to violence. In one, ISIS disseminated a message to followers and sympathizers containing a picture of the Church of the Holy Family in Barcelona with the words, “If you don’t have a weapon, you have a truck or a knife.”

The MOJ’s report on religious freedom cited 43 hospitals throughout the country that refused to treat Jehovah’s Witnesses who declined to consent to blood transfusions. The report stated that many hospitals denied treatment even for minor procedures and made no effort to identify a physician within the hospital or another medical facility willing to treat the patient. If a physician was willing to operate on or treat a Jehovah’s Witness, hospital administrators sometimes hindered the ability of these physicians to provide medical services to that patient. If another medical facility willing to treat a Jehovah’s Witness were found, hospitals sometimes refused to transport the patient to the other facility. The problem, according to the report, was most serious in smaller cities, where alternative medical options were limited.

In March according to press reports, neighborhood associations and others in the Barcelona district of Nou Barris called on authorities to stop the daily harassment of dozens of persons using a mosque located there. According to a district representative, neighbors opposed to the mosque banged pots and pans in protest every night, and on Fridays and weekends, members of far-right groups from outside the district came to harass and insult persons leaving the mosque. A member of the local Muslim community called on authorities to provide security, as did the priest of a Catholic Church in the neighborhood, who said, “They [Muslims] should have the same right that we have.”

In May a Barcelona court issued preliminary measures restricting seven members of the far-right National Democracy Party from communicating with or coming within 300 meters (1000 feet) of the Nou Barris mosque. Additionally, the court shut down their social media accounts from which it said they spread their hate speech. Authorities accused the perpetrators of vandalism, coercion, and incitement of hate against the Muslim community after having systematically perpetrated hostile actions against this community since March 2017.

In September a group of women protesters, some of them topless and wearing masks, surrounded Catholic Bishop of San Sebastian Jose Ignacio Munilla as he was entering a church to celebrate Mass. In March another group of women

protesters stripped in front of the Good Pastor Cathedral in San Sebastian, protesting remarks the bishop had made about feminism.

According to the ECRI report on the country, the Jewish community stated anti-Semitism was increasing in the media, and ignorance about Jews created opportunities for anti-Semitic sentiment. ECRI said frequent use of expressions such as “Islamic terrorism” and “Jihadist terrorism” in the press contributed to a rise in anti-Islamic sentiment and negatively influenced public perception of Muslims.

According to the MOJ report on religious freedom, FEREDe stated offenses and acts of incitement of hatred against Christianity were growing, although many incidents were not reported, and when they were, authorities did not always impute a religious motive to them. The FCJE cited continued anti-Semitism in mass media, and particularly in social media, by anonymous accounts. The Catholic Church reported increased instances of offensive speech against Catholicism, its priests, and the religious beliefs of its members, which, according to the Church, exceeded the normal scope of freedom of expression or opinion. The CIE cited particular concerns over societal discrimination against Muslim women, especially those wearing the hijab, in the workplace and schools and at swimming pools and beaches. CIE also reported growing hate speech against Islam, Muslims, and refugees, many of whom were Muslim, on social media, as well as increased incidents of vandalism against mosques. Each group called on the government to improve its response and provide better protection to places of worship.

In June authorities in the Canary Islands arrested a Moroccan national for disseminating hate speech in social media against the Jewish community.

In December the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) released its second survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism. EU-FRA targeted Jewish populations through community organizations, Jewish media, and social networks; 570 individuals who identified themselves as Jewish residents of Spain responded to the online survey. Seventeen percent said they had witnessed other Jews being physically attacked, insulted, or harassed in the previous 12 months, and 32 percent reported being harassed over the same period. Twenty-six percent of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because of their religion or belief; 73 percent thought anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

In March police found an incendiary device, described as akin to a Molotov cocktail, on the window of a Catholic church in Cordoba. Reportedly, the fuse had been lit, but the device did not explode. A similar incident occurred in June when a group broke windows at the Autonomous University of Madrid and threw incendiary devices at the chapel. Also in June unknown individuals started a fire in the Catholic Basilica of Santa Maria in the city of Elche. Persons inside the church put out the fire before it spread.

In July vandals ransacked a Catholic church in the town of Adrados in Leon Province, causing damages that residents estimated might exceed 30,000 euros (\$34,400). Authorities detained two suspects.

In July vandals painted swastikas on the walls of the Great Mosque of Valencia, hung up the mask of a pig, and wrote graffiti and signs reading “No Moors” and “Stop Islam, Stop Jews.”

In March unidentified individuals painted “Moors Get Out” and a target at the entrance to a mosque in Hernani, Guipuzkoa Province. The head of the Islamic Federation of the Basque Country, Aziz Messaoudi, spoke out against the vandalism, stating, “One cannot toy with the social peace of our society of Euskadi, because that is the red line we cannot cross.”

In February unknown individuals scrawled on the front of the Greater Synagogue of Barcelona, “Get Out of Our Land.” The synagogue is one of the oldest in Europe.

In March unidentified persons painted graffiti linking Jews to the Illuminati on the Holocaust Monument in Oviedo.

Press reported that in March on International Women’s Day, far-left feminists scrawled graffiti on Catholic churches in several cities throughout the country, including Madrid, Seville, Granada, Cordoba, and La Coruna. The graffiti criticized the Catholic Church, religion, or “the patriarchy” or was pro-abortion. One read, “The church that best illuminates is the one that burns.”

In January a graffiti reading “Muslims Not Welcome” was scrawled on a wall near the M30 Mosque in Madrid. The graffiti was signed with the initials “DNJ,” which, according to press reports, corresponded to the youth wing of National Democracy, a far-right political party without representation in the national or regional parliaments.

In May a Madrid court prosecuted Melisa Dominguez, the leader of the neo-Nazi group Hogar Social Madrid, for a hate crime in connection with an incident involving the M30 Madrid Mosque in March 2016. Dominguez was accused of throwing flares at or near the mosque and posting signs near it that contained hate speech. Dominguez' trial was ongoing at year's end.

In September the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue (AUDIR), a Catalan NGO comprised of members of multiple religious groups, organized the third of its "Night of Religions" in Barcelona, in which more than 30 religious centers representing 15 different faiths shared their religious traditions with the public. AUDIR continued to implement the project "Building Bridges," in which 40 youths from different faiths attended courses on interfaith dialogue, among other subjects. As part of the program, the participants visited places of worship in their neighborhoods.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy and consulate representatives met regularly with the MOJ, MOI, regional officials, and politicians to discuss anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, anticlericalism, and concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities. Issues discussed included access to permits for places of worship and to religious education, cemeteries and burial, pensions, religiously motivated hate crimes and hate speech, and public statements and campaigns to promote tolerance. They also raised these issues with religious leaders who participated in the Foundation.

Embassy officials met and communicated with leaders of CIE, FERED, FCJE, the Federation of Buddhist Communities, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other religious and civil society members, including imams of local mosques, Muslim youth leaders, NGOs, and business leaders in Madrid, Barcelona, and Melilla. Embassy and consulate officials heard the concerns of community members regarding discrimination and the free exercise of their religious rights, including anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, lack of religious education, and access to permits for places of worship.

To celebrate Religious Freedom Day in January, the embassy invited representatives from several faiths and the coordinator of the coexistence pact – a group of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish representatives, and academics and psychologists, which included as one of its goals the promotion of religious

tolerance – for a discussion on the state of religious freedom and equality in the country. During the discussion, the Ambassador underscored U.S. commitment to religious freedom and asked how the embassy could assist religious leaders in promoting these goals.

In February and March the Ambassador met with leaders of the (Catholic) Episcopal, Evangelical, Islamic, and Jewish federations to solicit recommendations on increasing religious freedom in Spain.

In June the Ambassador hosted an iftar to highlight the work of young Muslim leaders to an audience of Muslim activists, government officials, and Arab diplomats. A series of follow-on meetings with embassy officers provided opportunities for the youth leaders to share insights about the challenges they faced and ideas for strengthening U.S. efforts to help the Muslim community address those challenges.

In May the Consulate General in Barcelona organized an iftar that gathered leaders of the Muslim community in the region, including its younger generation, as well as regional public officials, law enforcement, and academics. Guests agreed on the need to improve actions aimed at promoting cultural and religious diversity in the region and to combat stereotypes.

The embassy continued its engagement with a group of young Muslim leaders who had taken part in embassy-sponsored visits to the United States. The embassy assisted the group with organizing community forums in several cities to discuss issues, including freedom of worship, religious tolerance, the role of media in spreading their messaging, and prevention of radicalization in Muslim communities.