

# FRANCE 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. The president and other government officials condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts, and the government deployed 7,000 security forces to protect sensitive sites, including religious ones. On November 1, the government ended the state of emergency in place since 2015. The government replaced it with legislation allowing prefects to close down a place of worship for up to six months if they found it promoted violence, hatred, discrimination, or terrorism. The government reported 11 of 19 Muslim religious sites it had closed over the previous two years remained closed. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said government authorities had interfered with their proselytizing activities in 20 cases. The government continued to enforce a ban on full-face coverings in public and the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols in public schools. The government announced a national plan to combat anti-Semitism.

There were crimes and other religiously motivated incidents against Jews, Muslims, and Christians, including killings or attempted killings, beatings, threats, hate speech, and vandalism. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) registered 121 anti-Muslim crimes, consisting of threats or violence, a 35 percent decline from 2016; anti-Semitic hate crimes fell by 7 percent to 311. The government, however, reported an increase in violent hate crimes against both Muslims and Jews: anti-Muslim violent hate crimes increased to 72 from 67 in 2016, while anti-Semitic violent hate crimes rose to 97 from 77 in 2016. In one incident involving the killing of a Jewish woman, Jewish groups criticized the government's delay in filing an indictment and initially excluding anti-Semitism as a motive. Jehovah's Witnesses cited five incidents of physical assault against their members, four of which involved injuries. According to an Ipsos poll, 22 percent of respondents thought Jews had too much power in the country, and 46 percent thought Islam was a threat to national identity. Attacks on religious sites declined to 978, an 8 percent drop from 2016.

The U.S. embassy, consulates general, and American Presence Posts (APPs) discussed religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in combating violent extremism, and cooperation on these issues with officials at the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs and with the country's Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights and Holocaust Issues. U.S.

officials met regularly with religious communities and their leaders throughout the country to discuss their religious freedom concerns and encourage interfaith cooperation and tolerance, often hosting events, such as a reception by the Ambassador for faith leaders and an iftar by the Charge d’Affaires, to discuss these topics. The embassy sponsored projects and events to combat religious discrimination and advance tolerance. The embassy also funded visits to the United States for government officials, religious leaders, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) directors on three different programs that included themes of interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 67.1 million (July 2017 estimate). The French government does not maintain official statistics on religious affiliation, but government studies occasionally provide estimates. As a result, statistics on religious affiliation are intermittently available and the statistical results can be inconsistent, depending on what criteria survey organizations use.

According to the most recent study by the National Institute for Demographic and Economic Studies, conducted in 2008 and published in 2010, 45 percent of respondents aged 18-50 reported no religious affiliation, while 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.

According to an Ipsos study published in the Protestant online news daily *Reforme* on October 26, 57.5 percent of respondents identify as Catholic, 3.1 percent as Protestant, 3.5 percent with other religions, 35 percent with no religion, and 1 percent preferred not to respond. The report estimated there are 600,000 Lutheran, 600,000 evangelical, and 800,000 nondenominational members in the Protestant community. Many evangelical churches primarily serve African and Caribbean immigrants.

The MOI estimates 8-10 percent of the population is Muslim. The Muslim population consists primarily of immigrants from former French colonies in North and sub-Saharan Africa and their descendants. According to a Pew Research Center study published in November, Muslims comprise 8.8 percent of the total population, numbering 5.72 million persons.

A 2016 report by Berman Jewish Data Bank estimated there are 460,000-700,000 Jews in the country, depending on the criteria chosen. According to the study, there are more Sephardic than Ashkenazi Jews.

The Buddhist Union of France estimates there are one million Buddhists in the country, mainly Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. 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, 80,000-100,000; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 66,000; Church of Scientology, 45,000; and Sikhs, who are largely concentrated in the Parisian suburbs, 30,000.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

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

The law, as well as international and European covenants, 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 (\$1,800) 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. Penalties for acts of violence that courts determine are religiously motivated are three to five years' imprisonment and fines of 45,000-75,000 euros (\$54,000-\$90,000), 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 (\$54,000). The government may expel noncitizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

Although the law does not require it, religious groups may apply for official recognition and tax-exempt status. Religious groups may register under two categories: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in for-profit as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both 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 (the administrative body representing the central government in each department) for recognition as an association of worship and tax-exempt status. Once granted, the association may use the tax-exempt status 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 its tax-exempt status, however, the government may change that status and require the association to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to the MOI, approximately 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status.

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."

On October 18, parliament passed counterterrorism legislation to succeed the state of emergency law, which had been in effect since 2015 and expired on November 1. The legislation incorporated several provisions of the emergency law. In particular, it grants prefects (representatives of the central government) in each department the authority to close a place of worship for a maximum of six months if they find comments, writings, or activities in the place of worship "provoke violence, hatred or discrimination or the commission of acts of terrorism or praise such acts of terrorism." The management of the place of worship has 48 hours to appeal the closure decision to an administrative court. Noncompliance with a

closure decision carries a six-month prison sentence and a fine of 7,500 euros (\$9,000).

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 police encounter a person 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. Police may not question or hold an individual for more than four hours. Refusing a police instruction to remove a face-covering garment carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$180) 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 (\$36,000) and may receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the victim is a minor.

By law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new places of worship. 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, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings and paying the salaries of local religious leaders. The overseas department of French Guiana, which is governed under 19th century colonial laws, may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Other overseas departments and overseas territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This provision also applies to the portion of Antarctica the government claims as an overseas territory.

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. Public schools do not provide religious instruction, except in Alsace-Lorraine and overseas departments and territories. Public schools, however, do teach information about religious groups as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear conspicuous religious symbols or to receive religious instruction 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.

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

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

### **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph:* The government reported deploying 7,000 security forces to provide reinforced security throughout the country at sensitive sites, including religious ones. At year's end, 11 of 19 Muslim religious sites the government had deemed "radical" and closed over the previous two years, remained closed. The Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), a French Muslim NGO, said the state of emergency the government ended on November 1 had disproportionately targeted Muslims, and the law that replaced it made the discrimination permanent. The government continued to enforce the ban on full-face coverings in public. The city of Lorette added "headscarves" to the list of banned clothing by bathers in a public swimming pool, and immigration authorities required a U.S. citizen to remove her headscarf to enter the country. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 20 incidents in which authorities interfered with the door-to-door religious proselytizing of its members. The mayor of Clichy-la-Garenne, a

suburb of Paris, did not renew the lease on a city-owned space used as a mosque and encouraged its members to use a new mosque the city had helped open in May 2016. The members of the closed mosque protested the mayor's decision by praying in front of city hall. The military increased the number of Muslim chaplains by 25 percent, to 270. The president and other government officials condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts and "Islamist extremism." In October the prime minister announced a national plan to combat anti-Semitism. Authorities expelled a Swiss Muslim preacher, saying he posed a risk to public order.

According to statistics released by Interior Minister Gerard Collomb and Defense Minister Florence Parly on September 14, the government deployed 7,000 security forces throughout the country to protect sensitive sites, including vulnerable Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim sites and other places of worship.

The Paris public prosecutor's office concluded there was "sufficient evidence" against Lebanese Canadian academic Hassan Diab to justify a trial. Authorities charged Diab with bombing a synagogue in Paris during Sabbath prayers in 1980, killing four persons and injuring 40 others. The prosecutor's decision meant the court would decide on whether Diab was in fact in the country at the time of the attack, according to media reports on December 13. An investigating magistrate was scheduled to make the final decision on whether the case would go to trial on charges of murder, attempted murder, and destruction of property as part of a criminal conspiracy. On November 14, according to media reports, Paris' Court of Appeals extended his pretrial detention for another six months.

On February 1, then-Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux issued a statement crediting a decline in reports of religiously motivated incidents in 2016 to the results of the government's action plan to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and all forms of discrimination linked to origin or religion. Le Roux cited the effectiveness of measures for protection of places of worship introduced in January 2015 and the successful mobilization of the country's institutions, especially its schools, after the attacks of 2015 and 2016. According to Le Roux, "Faced with racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Christian acts, we must not relax the guard, on the contrary ... we continue, and will always continue to fight against those absolutely intolerable acts which tarnish the Republic."

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of May the penitentiary system employed the following number of chaplains: 700 Catholic (compared with 690 in 2016), 350 Protestant (349 in 2016), 270 Muslim (217 in 2016), 50 Jewish, and 50

Orthodox Christian. The most recent figures from other groups were from January 2015, when there were 111 Jehovah's Witness and 10 Buddhist chaplains, and 50 from other religious groups. In the general detainee visiting area, any visitor could continue to bring religious objects to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues but could not pray. Policies remained in place allowing prisoners to pray individually in their cells, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments where they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 20 cases of authorities interfering with the community's public proselytizing. In all of these instances, the Jehovah's Witnesses continued with their proselytizing. In nine of the incidents, according to Witnesses, local police and mayors banned the community's public proselytizing. For example, on June 20, in the region of Bourgogne-Franche-Comte, a mayor prohibited Witnesses from preaching door-to-door, saying he was concerned about the security of the town's citizens. The group's lawyer wrote to the mayor, stating the law did not prohibit such activity, and the Witnesses continued their religious activity. In two other occurrences, municipalities enacted ordinances prohibiting or restricting door-to-door proselytizing. In the nine other cases, town mayors and local police required Jehovah's Witnesses to obtain authorization for door-to-door proselytizing and to show their identity cards as soon as they arrived in the community. For example, on April 15 in Saint-Ambroix, Centre-Val de Loire, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, the Gendarmerie asked them to obtain authorization from the mayor to participate in their door-to-door canvassing. The mayor also stated he did not want the Witnesses to proselytize within his community. The lawyer for the Witnesses wrote to the chief of staff of the Gendarmerie and to the mayor, stating the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses were legal. Neither the mayor nor the Gendarmerie responded.

On October 6, the administrative appeals court of Nantes ruled the annual installation of a nativity scene in the hall of the General Council of the Vendee was a festive "local cultural use" of more than 20 years and thus did not violate the principle of secularism. In November 2016, the Council of State, the country's highest administrative court, had ruled nativity scenes were permissible in town halls and other public buildings if the intent was "cultural, artistic, or festive."

On June 16, an American citizen said security agents at Nice Airport required her to remove her headscarf, despite her objections, in order to enter the country. The woman said authorities held her in an airport security room until she consented to removing her headscarf in front of a female security agent. In response to the



incident, French Ambassador to the United States Gerard Araud said the woman should take legal action to allow a French court to assess her charges of harassment based on her religious identity. The Nice border police office and Nice Airport authorities declined to comment on the incident. The woman reportedly filed suit in a French court, according to media reports.

According to media reports, the city of Lorette issued rules prohibiting full-body swimwear and veils that partially or totally concealed the face at a new public outdoor swimming pool opened on June 23. The rules required a woman to wear a one-piece or two-piece bathing suit to access the pool. According to media outlets, Aldo Oumouden, the Spokesperson for the Grand Mosque in the nearby city of Saint Etienne, said, “The mayor does not realize that this decision will further increase stigma. It is not only unnecessary but also devastating for community harmony.”

On October 6, the MOI reported that, since November 2015, authorities had closed 19 mosques or prayer rooms it deemed “radical” under the state of emergency, 11 of which remain closed.

In November 2016, the Council of State upheld a lower court’s decision to allow the town of Clichy-la-Garenne near Paris not to renew a lease for a space the Union of Clichy Muslim Associations (UAMC) was using as a mosque, according to media reports. The UAMC refused to vacate the space and continued to use it until March. On March 22, town officials changed the locks to the space, and worshipers could no longer enter it, according to press reports. During a March 24 demonstration against the closure, media outlets reported one of the imams of the former mosque said, “We demand from the mayor a dignified [prayer] space and a durable solution.” Mayor Remi Muzeau said he planned to transform the closed prayer space into a library and told the UAMC and worshippers they could use a new 1,500-square-meter (16,000 square-foot) Muslim cultural and religious center, opened in May 2016, near the old location, run by a different Muslim association. The UAMC, however, stated the new space was too far from the town center, could not accommodate a sufficient number of worshippers, and was not easily reachable via public transportation, although the city established a bus stop in front of the mosque.

Throughout the year, according to media reports, the UAMC led street prayers on Fridays in front of city hall to protest the mayor’s decision not to renew the lease. On November 10, media reported approximately 100 lawmakers, singing the national anthem and wearing tricolor sashes of office, marched on a street and

disrupted approximately 200 Muslim men from praying in a road. Police kept the two sides apart and made no arrests. Valerie Pecresse, President of the Ile-de-France Regional Council and a protest organizer, said, “Public space cannot be taken over in this way.” Mayor Muzeau stated, “I want to assure the tranquility and freedom of the people of my city,” and called on the government to “ban street prayers.” On November 19, Interior Minister Gerard Collomb, referring to the November 10 incident, stated, “We will prevent street praying,” but added, “Muslims must have a place to pray.”

On October 25, the Council of State ordered the removal of a cross from a 25-foot-tall statue of Saint Pope John Paul II on public land in Ploermel, a town in Brittany. The court ruled the statue could remain but the cross must be removed within six months because it violated the religion-state separation law. The National Federation of Free Thought, a grouping of humanist associations, and two residents of the town brought the case to court. Some Christians and politicians criticized the decision, calling it another example of efforts to erase the country’s Christian heritage.

In August a Dijon administrative court ruled that schools must provide an alternative to pork school lunches in the interest of Muslim and Jewish children who do not eat pork. The Muslim Legal Defense League (LDJM) had brought the case against a town council in the Burgundy region that stopped providing a choice for school lunches in 2015. The LDJM stated the town’s decision to stop providing nonpork meals was “illegal, discriminatory, and a violation of freedom of conscience and religion.” The administrative court stated it did not accept the LDJM’s argument about religious freedom but considered the “greater interest of the child.” The judge stated the town previously had provided alternative nonpork meals since 1984 “with no argument whatsoever.”

In March a primary school in the town of Malicornay in the central part of the country suspended a teacher after he reportedly read Bible passages to his students. A group of parents requested an investigation to determine if the teacher was attempting to proselytize his students or violating the country’s secular principles.

The CCIF stated the state of emergency in effect until November 1 had disproportionately targeted Muslims, conflating fighting terrorism with promoting anti-Muslim policies. In response to the legislation succeeding the state of emergency, the CCIF issued a statement on November 2 saying the new security legislation made the abuses permitted under the state of emergency a permanent element of the law.

On April 7, 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 fourth annual report evaluating secularism in schools, public spaces, and hospitals. The report urged media and elected representatives to cover religious matters responsibly and not sensationalize them. The Observatory also recommended greater financial transparency for religious associations.

On December 21, President Macron received leaders of major religious communities to discuss secularism, theology degrees in universities, and the placement of religious chaplains in hospitals, the military, schools, and prisons. Protestant and Jewish representatives stressed the importance of welcoming migrants.

On January 5, at an annual New Year’s meeting with religious leaders, then-President Francois Hollande thanked a group of seven religious leaders, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist leaders, for calling for unity following a difficult year marked by terrorist attacks in Nice and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray. Hollande warned of the threat of radicalization from traditional and online platforms and said it was necessary “to eliminate at the outset any amalgam between the religion of peace practiced by the Muslims of France and the odious uses of Islam by the assassins sponsored by Da’esh.” He also praised the work of religious-inspired organizations that brought “solidarity with the most deprived and also with the migrants who reach our soil after having survived terrible ordeals.”

On October 2, at an annual event celebrating the Jewish New Year at the country’s largest synagogue, Prime Minister (PM) Edouard Philippe announced a new national plan (2018-2020) to combat anti-Semitism. According to PM Philippe, the government would work closely with civil society and Jewish organizations to develop and implement the plan. He stated “a sustainable fight against anti-Semitism” must use all available preventive tools, including convention of the country’s largest Jewish umbrella organization, the culture and education. He said the plan would address online anti-Semitic activities and postings such as those that had “overrun social media.” On December 10, at the eighth Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF), PM Philippe said the government was protecting 822 Jewish schools in the country, as well as religious sites.

On March 10, the Republican Party (LR) published on Twitter an anti-Semitic caricature of then-presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron showing him with a

long hooked nose, wearing a top hat, and using a sickle to cut a cigar. The image resembled anti-Semitic propaganda from World War II (WWII), when the country's Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis and their deportation and extermination of Jews, according to media reports. After heavy criticism, the LR removed the tweet. A day after the tweet, LR presidential candidate Francois Fillon denounced the "unacceptable" cartoon, saying he would not tolerate dissemination of caricatures with markers of "anti-Semitic propaganda" and calling it "totally contrary to our values." Then-president of the NGO International League Against Anti-Semitism and Racism Alain Jakubowicz also condemned the tweet, saying, "It is absolutely terrifying. I don't know if I want to scream, cry, or give up." Macron filed a complaint in March against the LR for publishing the tweet; however, the Paris prosecutor abandoned the case on June 13 on grounds the case was an "insufficiently characterized offense." Although the LR launched an internal investigation, the identity of the publisher remained unknown.

On April 25, the Paris Criminal Court fined Mayor Robert Menard of Beziers 2,000 euros (\$2,400) for inciting hatred and discrimination by making anti-Muslim comments. The court convicted Menard for comments he made in a September 2016 interview when he stated the number of Muslim children in Beziers was "a problem" and for tweeting in the same month his regret at witnessing "the great replacement," an allusion to a term used by writer Renaud Camus to describe the country being overtaken by foreign-born Muslims. The fine was higher than the 1,800 euros (\$2,200) initially sought by the public prosecutor. The court also ordered the mayor to pay damages of up to 1,000 euros (\$1,200) to each of the seven antiracism organizations that had originally filed the suit against him.

On January 9, then-Minister of Interior Le Roux attended a memorial ceremony outside a Paris kosher supermarket, where two years earlier a gunman had killed four Jews and held 15 others hostage.

Former President Hollande, President Macron, and government ministers on many occasions condemned anti-Semitism and declared support for Holocaust education. These occasions included the February 22 annual CRIF dinner; the March 19 commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 30 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 WWII. At the July 21 event, President Macron said, "We will never surrender to the messages of hate; we will not surrender to anti-Zionism because it is a reinvention of anti-Semitism."

On September 13-14 in Paris, government officials and their Israeli counterparts held their third annual bilateral working group meeting to review efforts and best practices to counter anti-Semitism in France. Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights François Croquette led the country's delegation, which included the head of the Interagency Delegation to Counter Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Anti-LGBT Hatred (DILCRAH) and Ministry of Education and CRIF representatives.

On June 20, President Macron and Interior Minister Collomb attended an iftar hosted by the CFCM. At the event, President Macron met with CFCM leaders Ahmet Ogras and Anouar Kbibech, as well as Rector of the Great Mosque of Paris Dalil Boubakeur. In his remarks, President Macron, the first president to attend a CFCM iftar since 2007, said the country must counter individuals who twisted the Muslim faith to justify terrorist acts, better integrate Muslims, and strive to train imams domestically to ensure they represented and conveyed values of the country. Macron encouraged the CFCM's leaders to focus on increased dialogue with the different domestic Muslim communities. He also praised what he called the strong cooperation among the MOI, CFCM, and DILCRAH in countering anti-Muslim hate crimes.

As part of an established exchange program, the government continued to host 30 Moroccan, 120 Algerian, and 151 Turkish imams to work temporarily in the country to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism within Muslim communities, according to the latest available data published in a 2016 French Senate report. The report said the imams' countries of origin paid their salaries.

On October 2, PM Philippe said the government would not question the practice of ritual slaughter. His announcement followed the creation of a commission formed by Muslim and Jewish community leaders in 2016 to protect the practice of religious slaughter, which they said was under threat.

On April 8, authorities expelled Swiss Muslim preacher Hani Ramadan for posing a serious threat to public order, according to an MOI statement. Authorities escorted him from the eastern city of Colmar, where he was participating in a conference, to the Swiss border. The statement said Ramadan had in the past adopted behavior posing a threat to the country and that "the forces of law and order ... will continue to fight ceaselessly against extremism and radicalization." Press reports said authorities had cancelled several of Ramadan's conferences in the country during the year, notably in Roubaix in January.

In March Mayor of Montpellier Philippe Saurel joined Mayors United against Anti-Semitism, an international initiative calling on municipal leaders to publicly address and take concrete actions against anti-Semitism. As members of this initiative, mayors “pledge to pursue a zero-tolerance policy on anti-Semitism, ensure that anti-Semitic incidents are thoroughly investigated, raise public awareness of the problem, and make the physical security of Jewish communities a priority.” Other participating cities in the country included Paris, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Nice, Sarcelles, and Nancy.

In June the government announced the Pithiviers train station would become a Holocaust educational and memorial site. The station was the country’s first concentration camp during WWII, housing approximately 3,500 Jews in May 1941 before their deportation to Nazi death camps.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

*Summary paragraph:* There were crimes and other religiously motivated incidents against Christians, Jews, and Muslims, including killings, attempted killings, other violence, hate speech, and vandalism. In one incident in which a Muslim man defenestrated and killed a Jewish woman, Sarah Halimi, Jewish groups criticized the government’s delay in filing an indictment and initially excluding anti-Semitism as a motive. Other violent incidents included the killing of a Jewish woman, a home invasion where a Jewish family was beaten and threatened with death, five separate assaults against Jehovah’s Witnesses, assaults against two Jewish brothers, and an attempt to drive a car into a group of people gathered in front of a mosque. According to the MOI, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic crimes declined during the year, but violent crimes increased against both groups.

The MOI reported that total registered anti-Muslim crimes (threats or violence) declined 35 percent, to 121 from 185, in 2016, while total registered anti-Semitic crimes (threats or violence) fell 7 percent, to 311 from 335. Despite the overall decline, due to a significant drop in threats, there was an upsurge in violent crimes compared with 2016. Violent acts against Jews increased from 77 to 97, and those against Muslims rose from 67 to 72. Anti-Semitic threats dropped from 258 in 2016 to 214, and anti-Muslim threats fell from 118 to 49.

In October the National Observatory against Islamophobia (ONCI), a part of the CFCM, cited “institutional discrimination against Muslims in schools, by the police, and by local authorities” as cause for concern. The CCIF stated victims were “reticent” to report anti-Muslim acts due to lack of confidence in the justice system. According to ONCI, the decline in reported anti-Muslim incidents did not mean anti-Muslim sentiment in the country had decreased. The CFCM cautioned against equating the decrease in reported acts with increased tolerance for Muslims.

On April 4, a French Malian man, Kobili Traore, killed his 65-year-old Jewish neighbor, Sarah Halimi. Neighbors heard Traore beating Halimi while reciting the Koran and shouting “*Allahhu akbar*” (“God is great”) and calling her Satan before throwing her from the third-story window of her apartment. On July 10, authorities arrested Traore and charged him with voluntary homicide and forcible confinement. On September 27, the prosecutor added the charge of anti-Semitism to the indictment. CRIF and the NGO National Bureau for Vigilance against Anti-Semitism (BNVCA) criticized the prosecutor for the delay in filing an indictment and not including anti-Semitism as a motive for the murder from the beginning. The case continued at year’s end.

On November 2, a criminal court in Paris found Abdelkader Merah, brother of Mohamed Merah, who killed seven persons in 2012, including a rabbi and three children outside a Jewish school in Toulouse, guilty of criminal terrorist conspiracy in connection with the 2012 killings. The court sentenced him to 20 years in prison. The court’s panel of judges found Abdelkader Merah not guilty of complicity in the killings, a charge for which the prosecution was seeking life in prison. The court also sentenced another individual in the case, Fettah Malki, to 14 years in prison for criminal association in a terrorist operation and weapons charges. Lawyers of the victims’ families, according to media reports, said they were satisfied with the verdicts; however, some family members were disappointed the court did not find Abdelkader Merah complicit in the murders.

On September 7, four men and one woman took part in an attack on a Jewish family in Livry Gargan, a northern suburb of Paris. They confined, beat, and threatened to kill the family of three, according to BNVCA. Following the attack, Interior Minister Collomb issued a statement saying, “everything will be done to identify and arrest those who carried out this cowardly attack [which] appears directly linked to the victims’ religion.” Judicial sources reported authorities arrested and detained five individuals, a 50-year-old male with a criminal record, three younger males, and a 19-year-old female, on November 28. On December 1,

authorities charged them with armed robbery, illegal detention, and extortion with violence, motivated by the religious affiliation of the victims.

In October BNVCA reported to the Ministry of Education that students at a public school in Paris had assaulted a 10-year-old girl on several occasions because she was Jewish. After one assault, the girl was taken to a hospital with contusions to her stomach and rib cage, requiring 10 days to recover. Ministry of Education officials met with the mother to discuss the incident. BNVCA said the girl was transferring to another school.

On February 21, unidentified assailants assaulted two yarmulke-wearing brothers in Bobigny, a northeastern suburb of Paris. The two victims, aged 29 and 17, said their attackers yelled anti-Semitic insults and forced them to stop their vehicle in front of a cafe, from where other individuals came out to join the assailants. According to the preliminary investigation, one of the assailants attacked the victims with a hacksaw, injuring the hand of the elder brother. The younger brother suffered an injury to the shoulder. The two victims filed a complaint against the unidentified assailants, who remained at large. The investigation continued at year's end.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported five separate incidents in which individuals kicked, punched, or slapped members. On February 18 in Montagnac, Occitanie, a man invited a Witness who was proselytizing door to door onto his property and kicked him in the back twice, injuring him and causing him to lose two days of work. On February 20, in the town of Sens, a woman slapped an 87-year-old Witness distributing religious literature from a mobile cart. The Witness sustained injuries to her face, requiring three days of medical treatment. The victims filed criminal complaints in all five incidents. Police dismissed two of the cases and were investigating the three others at year's end.

On June 29, police arrested a man who attempted to drive his car over roadside barriers into a group of people gathered in front of a mosque in the Paris suburb of Creteil. According to the Paris Police Prefecture, a man tried several times to drive through the cones and barriers protecting the mosque and, failing to get through, fled the scene. No one was injured. The 43-year-old driver had previously received psychological counseling. The press reported the man said he wanted to "avenge the [terrorist attacks on the] Bataclan and the Champs-Elysees." Interior Minister Collomb issued a statement of solidarity with the Muslim community and said the "exact motives" of the attacker were under investigation.



In June authorities upheld the charge of anti-Semitism in the indictment against five assailants for an attack committed in 2014 against a young Jewish couple in Creteil. One of the five attackers was charged with rape and another with complicity in the rape; other charges against the five suspects included theft or attempted theft, extortion and false imprisonment with a weapon, or complicity.

On March 14, the European Court of Justice ruled a company could prohibit an employee from wearing a religious symbol if it had an internal rule banning the wearing of “any political, philosophical or religious sign.” The decision was a final ruling in a case involving a Muslim woman the firm Metropole had dismissed in 2009 for failing to remove her headscarf when meeting with clients.

The annual report of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an advisory body to the prime minister, released in March, included the results of a poll conducted in October 2016 by the Ipsos Institute, a research and consulting company, involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of more than 1,000 residents over the age of 18. According to the poll, 35 percent of the respondents believed Jews “have a particular relationship with money,” and 22 percent thought Jews had too much power in the country. The same poll found 31 percent of respondents had a negative image of Islam and 46 percent of them considered it a threat to national identity. The report also cited what it said was persistent societal rejection of Islamic religious practices, such as prayer and women wearing a veil. According to the report, there was a decrease in anti-Semitic and racist acts and a slight rise in tolerance, “despite an environment favorable to the rejection of the other, notably marked by terrorism and the arrival of refugees.”

According to Israeli news outlet *Ynetnews*, 3,500 French Jews moved to Israel in 2017, compared with 5,000 in 2016.

On November 7, according to media reports, a female dentist in the town of Grigny (southwest of Lyon), refused to treat a female patient wearing a veil. The doctor reportedly also told the patient she would refuse to treat the patient’s daughter at an appointment scheduled for November 9, even though the daughter was not wearing a veil. The patients reported the dentist’s behavior to SOS Racism, a collection of NGOs dedicated to countering racism, and the dentists’ association.

In March one of the writers of the popular *Bondy* blog, Mehdi Meklat, was discovered to be the author, under the pseudonym Marcelin Deschamps, of anti-

Semitic tweets, including, “Bring on Hitler to kill the Jews,” tweeted during the Cesars, the French equivalent of the Oscars ceremony.

On March 19, the interfaith community held events in Toulouse and Montauban to commemorate Jewish and military victims killed by Mohammed Merah in 2012. Then-Interior Minister Le Roux attended the ceremony and said “the Republic will not forget” the victims.

The MOI reported a drop of 8 percent in incidents directed against religious buildings and graves during the year, the first decline since the government began collecting such data in 2008. The overall number of incidents was 978, compared with 1,057 in 2016. Incidents against Christian sites fell by 8 percent, to 878 (949 in 2016), those against Muslims sites declined by 15 percent, to 72 (85), and those against Jewish sites increased by 22 percent, to 28 (23).

In August unknown individuals vandalized a plaque commemorating victims from the Children’s Home of Izieu, who were deported to Auschwitz in 1944. President Macron condemned the “shameful and cowardly act that won’t go unpunished.”

In September a juvenile court in Alsace sentenced five youths, who had vandalized a Jewish cemetery in 2015 when they were aged 15-17, to eight to 18 months in prison and 140 hours of community service. Shortly after issuing its decision, the court suspended the prison sentences. The defendants destroyed more than 300 graves and damaged a Holocaust memorial.

In November vandals defaced a plaque in a park in the Paris suburb of Bagneux commemorating Ilan Halimi, a Jew whom a gang kidnapped, tortured, and killed in 2006. The plaque was covered with anti-Semitic graffiti, including “Hitler,” a swastika, and “Free Fofana,” a reference to the leader of the gang that carried out the killing. Interior Minister Collomb called the vandalism “cowardly and odious,” and promised “everything will be done to identify the perpetrators.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses officials reported 11 cases of vandalism and arson at their houses of worship. Between March 15 and 23, vandals repeatedly damaged two Kingdom Halls in Bordeaux, spraying oil on the facade, tagging the buildings with graffiti, and attempting to set them on fire. The vandals also damaged cars belonging to Jehovah’s Witnesses. The local Witness association and the car owners filed a criminal complaint for each incident. The complaints for all nine cases of vandalism were pending at year’s end.

On April 23, authorities charged a woman with vandalizing a religious bas-relief at a Catholic church in Rennes-le-Chateau in Languedoc. After psychiatrists judged her mentally competent, she was arrested, tried, and convicted. On November 24, a Carcassonne criminal court sentenced the defendant to a two-month suspended prison term and ordered her to pay 17,718 euros (\$22,000) in fines for the damage.

On August 19, unidentified individuals vandalized a Catholic church in Marseille for a second time with graffiti and swastikas. District Mayor Bruno Gilles condemned the act of vandalism and said authorities might file charges.

An Ipsos study commissioned by the Catholic media group Bayard cited a new category of believers: “committed Catholics,” persons who did not necessarily attend church but identified with the Catholic Church through philanthropy, family life, or social involvement. According to the study, this group comprised 23 percent of the country’s population.

On April 26, the Coordination of Associations of Muslims in Strasbourg organized a series of interfaith roundtables in that city on the topic “Citizenship: Education for Living Together.” Participants included local representatives of religious communities and associations, representatives of the city and local councils, and Anouar Kbibeche, then-president of CFCM. Representatives of religious communities said French citizenship was a shared bond among the country’s diverse religious groups. The participants discussed the need to teach the region’s primary and secondary school students about the history and practices of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, the major religions in the country.

On May 13, the CFCM hosted a symposium entitled “Being Female in France Today,” which brought together Muslim leaders, scholars, and local activists to discuss religious issues, secularism, and Islam. Participants debated about societal and workplace discrimination that targeted Muslim women, the role of media in perpetuating stereotypes, and the need for more visible, credible Muslim female voices in the media. Some expressed frustration with the lack of opportunities for women to speak for themselves. For example, they said that when controversy broke out in 2016 over the conservative women’s bathing garment known as the “burkini,” most commentators invited to speak about the issue on television and radio were men.

On May 21, Strasbourg celebrated the tenth anniversary of its interfaith dialogue initiative. The initiative, launched at the request of the regional government, continued to bring together religious leaders from Protestant, Jewish, Catholic,

Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths to promote interfaith dialogue and to “foster friendship and a better understanding of others.”

In June the Conference of Catholic Bishops’ National Service for Relations with Islam again hosted an annual interfaith event with Muslims leaders from throughout the country. According to the bishops, the purpose of the event was to maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations and promote religious tolerance and understanding between Catholics and Muslims.

On November 5, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish organizations and individuals convened in Marseille as part of an initiative promoting interfaith tolerance and understanding. At the gathering, youth from the different communities played sports together. From November 10-12, Jewish and Muslim community leaders engaged in interfaith dialogue through visiting mosques and synagogues. According to organizers, these interreligious initiatives sought to facilitate communication, religious tolerance, and understanding among the communities.

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

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The U.S. Ambassador, Charge d’Affaires, and other staff from the U.S. embassy, consulates general, and APPs discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom and tolerance with relevant government officials, including at the religious affairs offices of the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. In March and August the Charge d’Affaires met with Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights and Holocaust Issues Francois Croquette. Topics discussed included religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, and bilateral cooperation on these issues.

The U.S. Ambassador hosted an interfaith reception with leaders of local religious organizations and interfaith groups in January. The reception welcomed local imams, rabbis, and priests, as well as leaders of religious associations and civil society representatives, to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance and highlighted the vital role of freedom of religion in democratic and prosperous societies.

The Charge d’Affaires hosted an iftar in June attended by leaders of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities at which she emphasized U.S. support for interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and nondiscrimination. In her remarks, the Charge d’Affaires stressed the iftar represented “the importance of tolerance, dialogue, and friendship.” In September the Charge d’Affaires attended a Yom Kippur observance with the Jewish community, where he stressed the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and the importance of countering anti-Semitism.

The Charge d’Affaires met in Paris with Grand Rabbi of France Haim Korsia, Rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris Dalil Boubakeur, the Rector of Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris Patrick Chauvet, CRIF president Francis Kalifat, president Joel Mergui of the Central Consistory (the leading Jewish institution administrating Jewish religious affairs), and CFCM president Ahmet Ogras and vice president Anouar Kbibech, as well as with religious leaders in other parts of the country, to discuss their views on religious freedom and tolerance. Through these meetings, the Charge d’Affaires stressed the United States government’s commitment to promoting freedom of religion, the benefits of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace and countering radicalization, and the importance of collectively countering anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Staff from the embassy and the consulates general and APPs met regularly with religious community leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and to advocate tolerance for diversity. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and interfaith dialogue and tolerance with private citizens, senior Christian, Muslim and Jewish representatives and NGOs. They also hosted meetings with CRIF, the Consistory, the CFCM, and Catholic priests working on interfaith dialogue. As part of embassy engagement with Muslim community contacts outside of Paris, embassy officials traveled to Rennes in March, Toulouse in September, and Strasbourg in October and December.

On March 24, APP Rennes and embassy officials met with members of two Rennes-based Islamic cultural organizations to discuss the status of the Muslim community in the Brittany region. The conversations focused on the organizations’ outreach efforts to the local community, as well as challenges the organizations have faced, such as limited access to prayer space, resistance from neighbors to the construction of new mosques, and concerns about the conflation of terrorism and Islam.

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 annual "Two Weeks of Equality" series. The year's topic focused on managing diversity and nationalism. In November as part of outreach programs around an American speaker on inclusion in sports, APP Bordeaux staff met with Jewish and Muslim youth leaders to discuss the possibility of supporting youth sports initiatives to unite religious communities.

The embassy awarded small grants to various NGOs across the country to support projects that aimed to advance religious tolerance and integration. One program worked to help integrate children of newly arrived immigrants from different ethnic and religious backgrounds into the social fabric of the country through storytelling and local social engagement. Another program, a documentary film project, explored issues of diversity, inclusion, and religious tolerance in schools in the Marseille, Rennes, and Paris regions.

In March the embassy coordinated the visit of a Los Angeles city government delegation that exchanged best practices with religious leaders, NGO representatives, local government (the mayor of Sevran), and local police representatives on fostering integration and inclusion in minority communities.

The embassy organized and funded visits for two groups of government officials, religious leaders, and NGO representatives to the United States on building community resilience to radicalization and violent extremism and youth outreach programs that included elements of interfaith dialogue. The first program included sessions on interfaith dialogue and higher education, faith-based outreach for immigrants and refugees, and interfaith models for community building. The second program included interfaith activities focusing on youth as a primary topic.