

# FRANCE 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice religion. The president and other government officials again condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts, and the government continued to deploy 7,000 security forces to protect sensitive sites, including religious ones. In June the government thwarted an attempted extremist plot to attack Muslims. In April authorities expelled an Algerian imam because of his radical preaching in Marseille. The government denied an Algerian Muslim woman citizenship after she refused to shake the hands of male officials. The government announced a 2018-2020 action plan to combat hatred, including anti-Semitism, and a nationwide consultation process with the Muslim community to reform the organization and funding of Islam within France. In July the interior minister announced expansion of a “precomplaint” system designed to facilitate reporting of crimes, to include anti-Semitic acts. The government continued to enforce a ban on full-face coverings in public and the wearing of “conspicuous” religious symbols in public schools. President Emmanuel Macron stated his intent to “fight against Salafism and extremism,” which he described as “a problem in our country.” In May the UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism said the government treated Muslims as a “suspect community” through the application of counterterrorism laws and called the government closure of mosques a restriction on religious freedom.

Religiously motivated crimes and other incidents against Jews and Muslims occurred, including killings or attempted killings, beatings, threats, hate speech, discrimination, and vandalism. The government reported 1,063 anti-Christian incidents, compared with 1,038 in 2017, most of which involved vandalism or other acts against property. According to government statistics, there were 100 crimes targeting Muslims, including an attack against Muslim worshippers outside a mosque, a 17 percent decrease compared with the 121 in 2017. The government also reported an additional 51 acts against Muslim places of worship or cemeteries. There were 541 anti-Semitic crimes, consisting of physical attacks, threats, and vandalism, an increase of 74 percent compared with the 311 incidents recorded in 2017. Anti-Semitic incidents included the killing of a Holocaust survivor, an acid attack against a rabbi’s baby, and threatening letters against Jewish groups citing the killing of the Holocaust survivor. Violent anti-Semitic crimes totaled 81, compared with 97 in 2017. A student leader at the University of Paris (the

Sorbonne) generated considerable debate after wearing a hijab on national television. According to a poll conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) in February, 43 percent of respondents thought Islam was not compatible with the values of the republic.

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. The Ambassador, embassy, consulate, and APP officials met regularly with religious communities and their leaders throughout the country to discuss religious freedom concerns and encourage interfaith cooperation and tolerance. The embassy sponsored projects and events to combat religious discrimination and advance tolerance. The embassy funded a visit to the United States for four nongovernmental organization (NGO) directors on an exchange program that included themes of interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance. It also sponsored the participation of three imams at a conference in Rabat focused on building interfaith relationships.

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

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 67.4 million (July 2018 estimate). 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 poll conducted in March by the private firm Opinionway found 41 percent of respondents older than 18 years identify as Catholic, 8 percent Muslim, 3 percent Protestant, 1 percent Buddhist, and 1 percent Jewish; 43 percent said they have no religious affiliation.

According to a survey conducted in March by the Catholic Institute of Paris and St. Mary's Catholic University in the United Kingdom, 64 percent of young people aged 16-29 in France declared themselves without a religion compared with 23 percent who said they were Catholic and 10 percent who said they were Muslim.

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 2017, Muslims number 5.72 million, 8.8 percent of the total population.

According to a 2017 Ipsos study published in *Reforme*, a Protestant online news daily, there are an estimated 600,000 Lutheran, 600,000 evangelical, and 800,000 nondenominational members in the Protestant community. Many evangelical churches primarily serve African and Caribbean immigrants.

A 2016 report by Berman Jewish Data Bank estimated there are 460,000-700,000 Jews, 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, 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, 66,000; Church of Scientology, 45,000; and Sikhs, 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 France adheres to, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of 1,500 euros (\$1700) 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 (\$51,600-86,000), 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 (\$51,600). 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, Catholics perform religious activities through their associations of worship and operate schools through their cultural associations.

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, 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witness, 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."

Counterterrorism legislation grants prefects 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 (\$8,600). The core provisions of the legislation will expire at the end of 2020 unless renewed by parliament.

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 (\$170) 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 up to 30,000 euros (\$34,400) and may receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the person coerced 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.

The law separating religion and state does not apply in three classes of territories. Because Alsace-Lorraine (currently comprising the Departments of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and la Moselle and known as Alsace-Moselle) 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. Pastors, priests, and rabbis of these four recognized faiths in Alsace-Moselle receive a salary from the interior ministry, and the country’s president, with the agreement of the Holy See, appoints the Catholic bishops of Metz and Strasbourg. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. 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-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. In Alsace-Moselle, religious education is compulsory in public primary and secondary schools, although students may opt for a secular equivalent with a written request from their parents. Religious education classes are taught by members of the faiths concerned and are under the control of the respective churches. Elsewhere in mainland France, public schools 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 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 from non-exempt countries 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 law criminalizes the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, treating it as “a provocation to discrimination or hatred or violence towards a person or a group of persons because of their origin or belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race, or a determined religion.”

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

### **Government Practices**

On June 23, the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) arrested 10 men linked to a suspected far-right extremist plot to attack Muslims, according to media reports. The suspects were arrested in the Paris and southwestern regions and on the island of Corsica and charged with criminal association with a terrorist enterprise. Among the detainees was a retired police officer whom investigators considered the head of the network. The suspects, who were previously unknown to authorities, reportedly had an “ill-defined plan to commit a violent act targeting people of the Muslim faith,” according to a source close to the investigation. LCI TV reported the group was planning to “target radical imams, Islamist inmates released from prison, and veiled women chosen at random in the streets.” In a June 24 statement, Interior Minister Gerard Collomb hailed the arrests and welcomed “DGSI’s constant commitment to the protection of the French people from any violent action, no matter where it comes from.”

In January investigating magistrates dismissed the court case against Lebanese-Canadian academic Hassan Diab, who was charged with bombing a synagogue in Paris during Sabbath prayers in 1980, killing four and injuring 40. The magistrates said they found the evidence against Diab inconclusive and ordered his release. Prosecutors appealed Diab's discharge, and on October 26, the Paris Appeals Court requested additional expert testimony before ruling. The court had not issued a ruling by year’s end. Diab was extradited from Canada in 2014.

On July 10, a senate report stated authorities had closed four places of worship under the counterterrorism law between November 1, 2017 and June 8. On December 13, the newspaper *La Voix du Nord* reported the prefect of the North Department applied the counterterrorism law to close the As-Sunnah prayer room in Hautmont for six months. According to a statement issued by the prefecture, the prayer room’s activities and the ideas disseminated there “provoke violence, hatred, and discrimination, and praise acts of terror,” and the prefecture closed the prayer room “with the sole purpose of preventing the commission of acts of terrorism.”

On April 20, authorities expelled Algerian imam El Hadi Doudi, the leader of the Salafist As-Sounna Mosque in Marseille, to Algeria. This decision followed the closing of As-Sounna for six months by the Bouches-du-Rhone Prefecture in

December 2017 because of what it stated was Doudi's radical preaching, which, according to press reports, inspired attendees to join ISIS. According to authorities, sermons at the As-Sounna Mosque, sometimes disseminated via internet, preached in favor of armed jihad and the death penalty for adulterers and apostates, and used insulting or threatening terms towards Jews. The As-Sounna Mosque, which had approximately 800 worshippers for its Friday prayers before its closure, was one of 80 places of Islamic worship in Marseille. The mosque did not reopen after the six-month closure, because, according to the Marseille online newspaper *Marsactu*, the city of Marseille invoked its legal "preemption right" to take possession of the site. According to a report in *Le Parisien* newspaper in May citing an interior ministry source, the purpose of the preemption was to prevent the mosque from reopening, while according to a report in *La Provence* newspaper citing a source in the Marseille municipality, the city acquired the property for purposes of urban renewal.

In an April 12 interview, President Macron stated his intent to "fight against Salafism and extremism," which he described as "a problem in our country." In September Interior Minister Collomb stated that since 2017, the country had expelled 300 radical imams.

On May 16, the prefect of the Hérault Department closed a small Muslim prayer room in a townhouse in Gigan, which the authorities said they had considered a Salafist "reference point" for six months. According to the prefectural decree posted on the townhouse, the prayer room was "an influential place of reference of the Salafist movement, advocating a rigorous Islam, calling for discrimination, hatred and violence against women, Jews, and Christians." Information as to whether the prayer room reopened after the six-month period was unavailable at year's end.

The government continued to deploy 7,000 security forces throughout the country to protect sensitive sites, including vulnerable Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim sites and other places of worship. On March 30, NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers reported the government deployed 70,000 law enforcement personnel from March 31 until April 7 to protect places of worship during Easter celebrations.

In April authorities denied an Algerian woman citizenship for refusing to shake hands with male officials at a French nationalization ceremony in the Department of Isère in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region due to her religious convictions. The country's top administrative court, the Council of State, ruled there were sufficient grounds to do so since the woman's refusal "in a place and at a moment

that are symbolic, reveals a lack of assimilation,” and that the decision was not detrimental to her freedom of religion.

On September 4, a court in Nanterre fined the Union of Clichy Muslim Association (UAMC) 17,000 euros (\$19,500) for organizing Friday street prayers on 34 occasions without first informing city or prefecture officials of its plans. The UAMC had been conducting the street prayers as a protest in front of the mayor’s office in Clichy-la-Garenne, after the town declined to renew the UAMC’s lease on a space it had been using as a mosque and expelled the group from the site in 2017. The UAMC had rejected as inadequate an alternative space offered by the town.

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of August 2017 the penitentiary system employed the following number of chaplains: 695 Catholic, 347 Protestant, 224 Muslim, 76 Jewish, 54 Orthodox Christian, 170 Jehovah’s Witness, and 19 Buddhist. In detainee visiting areas, visitors could bring religious objects to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues but could not pray. Prisoners could pray in their cells individually, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments where they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

On June 19, the administrative court of Nice ordered the Mayor of Cannes to refund a fine levied on a woman for violating an “anti-burkini order” at the beach. In August 2016, municipal police had fined the woman and told her she could not remain at the beach while wearing a burkini. After the terrorist attack in Nice in 2016, Cannes and several other coastal cities banned burkinis on the beaches. However, later that same year, the Council of State ruled that these decrees were illegal.

On August 10, the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) criticized a 2014 Supreme Court ruling upholding the 2008 dismissal of a woman from a private nursery in the town of Chanteloup-les-Vignes for refusing to remove her veil at work. The council stated that prohibiting a person from wearing a headscarf in the workplace interfered with her right to manifest her religion.

On October 23, the UNHRC found the country violated the human rights of two women by fining them for wearing *niqabs* in two separate cases in 2012. The committee received the complaints in 2016 and issued the decisions in the two cases concurrently. The government had 180 days to report to the committee action taken to respond to the violation and to prevent similar violations in the future. On October 23, the government issued a statement declaring “the total

legitimacy of a law [prohibiting concealment of the face in public spaces] whose goal is to uphold the conditions for living together harmoniously while fully exercising one's civil and political rights,” and adding, “Everyone is free to appear in public wearing clothing that expresses a religious conviction, so long as it allows the face to be seen.” The statement cited a ruling by the country’s Constitutional Court that the law complied with the constitution and a European Court of Human Rights ruling that the law did not infringe upon freedom of conscience or religion and was not discriminatory. In its statement, the government said it would convey its views in a follow-up report to the UNHRC.

On December 11, the senate adopted a resolution reaffirming the importance of the 2010 law prohibiting the concealment of the face in public spaces and calling on the government to maintain the legal framework “relative to the wearing of the full-face Islamic veil in the public space.”

UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism Fionnuala Ni Aoilain expressed concern that counterterrorism legislation enacted in 2017 restricted freedom of religion, movement, and expression in the country. After a weeklong visit in May, Ni Aoilain said, “the scope of these measures constitutes a de facto state of qualified emergency in ordinary French law.” She said the government treated Muslims as a “suspect community” through the “broad application” of counterterrorism law and called the closure of mosques a restriction on religious freedom.

Pursuant to the 2014 agreement between France and the United States on Compensation for Certain Victims of Holocaust-Related Deportation from France Who Are Not Covered by French Programs, the United States established the Holocaust Deportation Claims Program. Under the agreement, which entered into force on November 1, 2015, France provided a lump sum of \$60 million to the United States for distribution to eligible claimants. At year’s end, payments to claimants from this fund totaled \$30,028,500.

Speaking on March 19 at the National Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced the broad outlines of a three-year national action plan, covering the 2018-2020 period, to combat racism and anti-Semitism in the country, with a strong focus on countering online hate content. Accompanied by seven other ministers and the head of the Interagency Delegation to Counter Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hatred (DILCRAH), Philippe stated the action plan would have four key targets:

countering online hate content; improving victim protection services; anti-racism education; and developing new areas of mobilization against hate.

The plan would encompass specific measures, including: advocating for an EU-level law to require social media platforms to more quickly remove hate content on their servers; imposing heavy fines on social media companies that failed to remove hate content within 24 hours; increasing the capacity and staffing of the government's Pharos online platform to register and remove online hate content; creating a national anti-racism prize named after Ilan Halimi, a young Jewish man killed in 2006, to recognize the efforts of youth fighting racism and anti-Semitism; and launching a campaign to increase awareness of racism in sport. The prime minister said a three-person committee would develop the details of the action plan and submit it to the government for review and implementation.

In a July 5 speech before the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF), then-Interior Minister Collomb announced the extension of law enforcement's online "precomplaint" system to racist and anti-Semitic acts in order to facilitate action and "prosecute anti-Semitic offenders even more effectively." The system previously was restricted to property crimes. Grievants may submit their identity and contact information, the location of an incident, and other relevant facts on a government website and, after filling out the precomplaint, go to a police station to sign and validate the complaint to initiate an investigation.

On May 15, 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 fifth annual report evaluating secularism in schools, public spaces, and hospitals. According to the report, the subject of secularism remained a sensitive one, although "direct attacks on secularism" were not widespread. The report stated there was a need for training and education to overcome "deep ignorance" of the law.

President Macron delivered his New Year's greetings to the country's religious communities at the Elysee Presidential Palace on January 4. He welcomed two representatives each from Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups. Prime Minister Philippe and then-Interior Minister Collomb also attended. Macron's speech focused mainly on secularism, which he underlined as a fundamental pillar of the country, before highlighting the essential place for religion in society and the importance of teaching theology. The president hailed the role played by Christian charitable organizations in assisting refugees while

recalling the “ethical tension” between the right of asylum and “the reality of our society, its capacity to welcome.” Macron also said he would meet religious community leaders on a regular basis behind closed doors to consult on various topics. He cited the need to “structure” Islam in the country and to train imams to fight radicalization. “I will help you,” he said.

On June 12, then-Interior Minister Collomb attended an iftar hosted by the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), the official government structure responsible for relations with the country’s Muslim community. Collomb, whose ministry oversees government relations with religious communities, strongly defended secularism and stated the government “will never accept ... the stigmatization of a religion” nor “to reduce Islam to Islamism.” He said the country must focus on the preventing radicalization, training for imams, sources of financing of mosques, and structuring the administration of Islam in the country. “It is up to the Muslims of France to address these issues in the long-term,” he said. Attendees at the event included Muslim community leaders, interfaith leaders, other government officials, and ambassadors.

On June 25, then-Minister Collomb announced a nationwide consultation process with the Muslim community to reform the organization and the funding of Islam in the country. Prefects in each department would hold listening sessions with local representatives from the Muslim community on issues related to institutional representation, financing of Islamic places of worship, and training of imams. He stated the dialogue would strive to include all the diversity of the Muslim community, including younger and female voices, as well as civil society members, according to an administrative circular he sent to prefects. The government said it expected to release the results of the dialogue in 2019.

Speaking before the Conference of Catholic Bishops of France (CEF) on April 9, President Macron said he supported “repairing” ties between the state and the Catholic Church. Macron was the first sitting president to speak at a CEF event. He stated the Catholic Church should engage in the political debate on key issues important to the Church, such as treatment of migrants, possible legislative changes concerning bioethics, and medically assisted reproduction for single women and lesbian couples, and generally encouraged Catholics to engage more in politics. His appearance generated criticism from left-wing politicians, including Jean-Luc Melenchon, Alexis Corbiere, and Olivier Faure, who said it flouted the strict separation of church and state mandated by the law on secularism.

President Macron met with Pope Francis at the Vatican on June 26 to discuss immigration and other challenges facing Europe. The Vatican described the meeting as “cordial” and said it highlighted the “good existing bilateral relations” between the two nations. Speaking later to the press, Macron described the meeting as “intense” and said he told Pope Francis that the “progressive way to handle the migrant crisis was through a true policy of development for Africa.”

On January 9, Prime Minister Philippe, then-Interior Minister Collomb, Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet, and government spokesperson Benjamin Griveaux attended a memorial ceremony outside a Paris kosher supermarket, where two years earlier a gunman had killed four Jews and held 15 other people hostage. Former President Francois Hollande and former Prime Ministers Manuel Valls and Bernard Cazeneuve also attended the event.

On July 22, Prime Minister Philippe held a ceremony in Paris honoring the victims of the Velodrome d’Hiver roundup of July 1942 in which 13,000 French Jews, including 4,000 children, were deported to extermination camps. “There is one area in which we must do better, that of the restitution of cultural property,” stolen during the Nazi occupation, Philippe said. A Ministry of Culture report submitted in April to Culture Minister Françoise Nyssen criticized the current policy of restitution as inefficient and lacking ambition, coordination, leadership, and visibility. As a result, the Commission for the Compensation of the Victims of Spoliation was to examine all cases of restitution and transmit its recommendations to the prime minister, according to an official statement released by the Ministry of Culture. In addition, the Ministry of Culture said it would take a more active role in the search and restitution of stolen properties. The report identified 2,008 cultural works with no identified owner.

Recalling his plan to fight racism and anti-Semitism launched in March, Prime Minister Philippe reiterated his “absolute desire to change French law and European law to remove hate content on the internet, to unmask and punish its authors.”

President Macron and government ministers condemned anti-Semitism and declared support for Holocaust education on several occasions including the March 7 annual CRIF dinner; the March 19 commemoration of the sixth anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 30 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration; and the June 1 French Judaism Day observance.

In a November 9 Facebook post, Prime Minister Philippe announced the number of anti-Semitic acts committed in the first nine months of the year rose by 69 percent compared to the same period in 2017. Philippe did not quote the exact numbers of anti-Semitic acts or their nature, such as physical attacks, threats, or vandalism. Underlining that his announcement coincided with the 80th anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom by the Nazis against Jews, PM Philippe wrote, “Every aggression perpetrated against one of our citizens because they are Jewish echoes like the breaking of a new crystal.... We are very far from being finished with anti-Semitism.” Referencing Elie Wiesel’s “danger of indifference,” Philippe pledged the government would not be indifferent and recalled recent acts taken to combat anti-Semitism. Acts he cited included toughening of rules against hate speech online; mobilizing a national rapid-response team from the Ministry of Education and DILCRAH to support teachers reporting cases of anti-Semitism; and the trial use of a network of investigators and magistrates specifically trained in the fight against hate acts, which could later be extended nationwide.

On December 20, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer announced the launch of an online platform that teachers could use to report cases of anti-Semitism and racism to the education ministry.

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

As part of an established exchange program, the government continued to host the visit of 30 Moroccan, 120 Algerian, and 151 Turkish imams to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism within Muslim communities. The imams’ countries of origin paid their salaries. During Ramadan, when there was an increased number of worshippers, between 250 and 300 imams came to France temporarily.

On June 11, the Diocese of Vannes moved a 25-foot-tall statue of Saint Pope John Paul II from public land in Ploermel in Brittany to a Catholic school in the same town. In 2017, the Council of State had ruled the statue could remain on public land but ordered the removal of the cross on the statue within six months because it violated the law separating church and state. Rather than removing the cross, the diocese elected to move the entire statue to Church-owned land. Some Christians and politicians criticized the decision, calling it another example of efforts to erase the country’s Christian heritage.

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

According to the latest government estimates available, the MOI reported registered crimes targeting Muslims (threats or violence) totaled 100, down from 121 in 2017; there were an additional 45 acts of vandalism against Muslim places of worship and six acts of desecration against Muslim cemeteries. The reported anti-Semitic crimes (threats or violence) increased to 541, compared with 311 in the previous year. Despite an overall increase resulting from a significant rise in threats, violent acts against Jews fell from 97 to 81. Anti-Semitic threats rose from 214 in 2017 to 358, and acts of vandalism totaled 102. The government also reported 1,063 anti-Christian incidents, most of which involved vandalism or other acts against property, compared with 1,038 in 2017. The government did not provide a detailed breakdown of anti-Muslim or anti-Christian acts registered during the year.

On March 23, Holocaust survivor Mireille Knoll, aged 85, was found dead in her Paris apartment. An autopsy revealed she had been stabbed at least 11 times before being burned in a fire, which was ruled to be arson. Authorities arrested two individuals in connection with the killing and placed them in pretrial detention. The Paris prosecutor's office was investigating the killing as a hate crime. After the incident, thousands of people participated in a "white march," a silent gathering to commemorate the victim, in Paris. On May 27, President Macron stated Knoll was "murdered because she was Jewish."

In February unknown individuals placed acid in the stroller of a rabbi's baby daughter in Bron. The child suffered burns on her back and legs. According to an ongoing police investigation, anti-Semitic motives were involved.

In March police arrested four teens suspected of beating a Jewish boy with a stick and taking his kippah outside a synagogue north of Paris. The suspects reportedly called the boy and his siblings "dirty Jews."

On August 24, a man attacked two male worshippers with a bicycle chain as they were leaving a mosque in the town of Lens, near Calais. The Mayor of Lens, Sylvain Robert, condemned the attack in a statement. According to the mayor, during his court hearing, the accused cited "ideological and racist" justifications for his act. On September 26, the Lens Court sentenced the accused to an 11-month prison sentence for aggravated assault, referencing the racist nature of the attack.

In July a psychiatric evaluation of Kobili Traore, charged with killing his 65-year-old Jewish neighbor, Sarah Halimi, in 2017, determined Traore was not responsible for his actions and therefore unable to stand trial. Authorities were planning to conduct a third psychiatric evaluation of Traore, who remained incarcerated at year's end. On February 27, reversing a previous decision, the judge presiding over the case added the charge of anti-Semitism as a motive for the crime. The magistrate made this decision after hearing testimony from Traore. In a statement, CRIF hailed the judge's decision and expressed "satisfaction" and "relief."

Authorities scheduled a new trial for March 2019 in Paris Criminal Court for Abdelkader Merah on the charge of complicity in the killing by his brother, Mohammed Merah, of seven persons outside a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012. In November 2017, prosecutors appealed the 2017 acquittal of Abdelkader Merah on the complicity charge; the court had convicted him on the lesser charge of criminal terrorist conspiracy.

By year's end authorities had not set a date for the trial of five individuals arrested in November 2017 and charged with carrying out an attack on a Jewish family in Livry Gargan earlier that year.

On July 6, a court in Val-de-Marne sentenced three young men who carried out a rape and robbery of a Jewish couple in the Paris suburb of Creteil in 2014. Abdou Salam Koita and Ladje Haidara, who committed the rape, were present in court. Houssame Hatri, who made anti-Semitic slurs during the attack, remained at large and was convicted in absentia. The three, who were sentenced to eight, 13, and 16 years in prison, respectively, bound and gagged their victims before carrying out the rape and stealing jewelry and bank cards. "Jews do not put money in the bank," one of them reportedly said. During the attack Hatri also reportedly said that the attack was "for my brothers in Palestine" before suggesting the perpetrators should "gas" their victims. Two accomplices received sentences of five and six years in jail.

On June 29, the Paris prosecutor's office opened an investigation into anti-Semitic letters received by at least six Jewish associations, including CRIF. The letters, signed by "The Black Hand," were posted June 18 and referred to the killing of Mireille Knoll, according to press reports. The letters read in part, "Dear Jews, you bitterly mourn the death of an old Jew murdered for her money. We think you pay little for the number of crimes you commit every day. Enjoy it, because the day of punishment will come."

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; 3,869 individuals who identified themselves as Jewish residents of France responded to the online survey. Twenty-two percent said they had witnessed other Jews being physically attacked, insulted, or harassed in the previous 12 months, and 27 percent reported being harassed over the same period. One-fifth of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because of their religion or belief; 93 percent thought anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

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 November 2017 by the Ipsos Institute, a research and consulting company, involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 1,003 residents over the age of 18. According to the poll, 38.2 percent of the respondents (2 percent fewer than in 2016) believed Jews "have a particular relationship with money," and 19.7 percent thought Jews had too much power in the country. The same poll found 29.5 percent of respondents had a negative image of Islam and 43.9 percent (2.1 percent fewer than in the previous year) 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 of prayer and women wearing a veil. According to the report, there was a decrease in anti-Semitic and racist acts compared with 2016, "despite a general context favorable to the rejection of the other, notably marked by terrorism, the arrival of migrants, unemployment, the importance of security issues reported in the media, and the rise in populism in Europe."

In May Maryam Pougetoux, aged 19, the leader of the Sorbonne chapter of the French National Students' Union, set off a debate by wearing a hijab on national television. Laurent Bouvet, a secularist and member of *Le Printemps Republicain* (Republican Spring), a group created to defend secularism, stated in a Twitter post, "We aren't hunting anyone but merely pointing to the inconsistency" of Pougetoux wearing a hijab, arguing it contradicted her support for abortion rights and other "feminist principles." Then-Interior Minister Collomb called her appearance "shocking," while Marlene Schiappa, the junior minister for gender equality, said she saw in Pougetoux's act a "form of promotion of political Islam." Hijabs are permitted on college campuses.

According to media reports, on June 28, a judge fined a tobacco shop owner in the town of Albi 1,000 euros (\$1,100) for refusing goods and services to a Muslim woman who was wearing a *jilbab*. The woman had come to the merchant's store to pick up a parcel she had delivered there. The woman's face was visible when she presented her identity card to the shop owner, and she offered to remove her veil in a setting where no men were present, according to reports. The judge also ordered the shop owner to pay to each of the four women who accompanied the plaintiff to the store 800 euros (\$920) for moral damages and 500 euros (\$570) for legal fees, as well as 800 euros (\$920) in damages each to the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism and the Movement Against Racism and Friendship Between Peoples, and one euro (\$1) to the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF).

On Easter Monday (April 2), unidentified individuals vandalized the church of Fenay, near Dijon. According to the parish priest, the attackers broke the door of the sacristy with an ax, then threw down and trampled the consecrated hosts. "This is a deliberate act of desecration," said the priest, who filed a complaint, according to press reports. The investigation continued at year's end.

On January 26, unknown individuals painted a large swastika at the entrance to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

On June 17, Strasbourg celebrated the 11th anniversary of its interfaith dialogue initiative, which continued to bring together religious leaders from Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths.

In July, for the second consecutive year, young Christians and Muslims from across the country, Europe, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East participated in a three-day "weekend of friendship" event at the Taizé Ecumenical Community in the Department of Saone-et-Loire. The approximately 200 participants addressed a series of questions from the organizers on prayer, religious freedom, and fasting.

In December 80 civil society representatives from 25 countries attended the ninth annual Muslim-Jewish Conference in Paris, exchanging best practices and discussing ways to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiment. The organizers said interfaith dialogue was more important than ever and committed to supporting Jewish and Muslim communities in the country and around the world.

The Council of Christian Churches, composed of 10 representatives 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. The council met twice in plenary session and twice at the working level.

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

The U.S. Ambassador 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. Topics discussed included religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, the BDS movement, Holocaust-related compensation, and bilateral cooperation on these issues.

In June embassy and visiting U.S. government officials met MFA Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights Francois Croquette regarding the 2014 Agreement on Compensation for Certain Victims of Holocaust-Related Deportation from France Who Are Not Covered by French Programs between France and the United States.

The Ambassador met in Paris with Grand Rabbi of France Haim Korsia, Rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris Dalil Boubakeur, Apostolic Nuncio Monsignor Luigi Ventura, Rector of Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris Patrick Chauvet, CRIF president Francis Kalifat, and Joel Mergui of the Central Consistory (the leading Jewish institution administrating Jewish religious affairs), to discuss their views on religious freedom and tolerance. In these meetings, the Ambassador stressed the U.S. 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, consulates general, and APPs met regularly with religious community leaders, activists, and private 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 senior Christian, Muslim, and Jewish representatives and NGOs such as Coexister and AJC Europe. They also hosted meetings with CRIF, the Consistory, the CFCM, Catholic priests, and Protestant representatives working on interfaith dialogue.

The Ambassador and embassy officials engaged regularly with senior Israeli embassy representatives on efforts and best practices to counter anti-Semitism in France. U.S. embassy officials closely monitored and reported on anti-Semitic incidents in the country and the official government position on the BDS movement.

In September the embassy hosted a conference in partnership with the German Marshall Fund on inclusive leaders, including those promoting interfaith collaboration and dialogue, from NGOs Coexister, Sparknews, The Next Level, and the Ariane de Rothschild Fellowship, which focused on developing leaders and creating stronger networks across sectors, including interfaith relations.

The embassy awarded small grants to various NGOs across the country to support projects that aimed to advance religious tolerance and integration. One grant for \$17,500 to Coexister was to fund a documentary film based on the group's 2019-2020 Interfaith World Tour, a yearlong voyage around the globe centered on the theme of material and immaterial religious heritage and designed to observe interfaith initiatives and gather best practices to share with youth organizations across the country.

In April the embassy identified and funded the travel of three imams to the two-day conference for European imams in Rabat organized by the U.S. NGO Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF) in partnership with the U.S. embassy in Rabat and the Imam Training Center in Rabat. The conference focused on interfaith relationship building, radicalization prevention, and countering violent extremism in each imam's home community.

In April the embassy funded a program in the United States for four NGO leaders. Representatives from Parle-moi d'Islam (Speak to Me about Islam), focused on the prevention of youth radicalization, Coexister, which promotes diversity, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence across faiths, and the Hozes Institute, dedicated to training imams in French language and culture, participated. The program included meetings with the Islamic Community Center of Phoenix and with a panel of female religious leaders in New York City that examined how U.S. religious groups function in the context of a democratic society and illustrated U.S. approaches to interfaith dialogue.

On September 28, the Consulate General in Strasbourg hosted an interfaith lunch to discuss issues affecting religious communities, including the separation of church and state, state funding of religion, and the official status granted to four

religions (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Judaism) in Alsace-Moselle by the Alsatian Concordat of 1801.

On September 19, staff from APP Bordeaux joined faith leaders, elected Bordeaux officials, members of the academic community, and various social organizations at a gathering to promote interfaith dialogue and support nondiscrimination initiatives. As part of the event, participants attended a screening of the short-film “Ramdam,” produced by Bordeaux-based film director Zangro, which depicted the trials and tribulations of a fictional imam living in Mont-de-Marsan.