

GERMANY 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of faith and conscience and the practice of one's religion. The country's 16 states exercise considerable autonomy on registration of religious groups and other matters. Unrecognized religious groups are ineligible for tax benefits. The federal and some state offices of the domestic intelligence service continued to monitor the activities of certain Muslim groups and mosques. Authorities also monitored the Church of Scientology (COS), which reported continued government discrimination against its members. Certain states continued to ban or restrict the use of religious clothing or symbols, including headscarves, for some state employees. In May federal anti-Semitism commissioner Felix Klein, responding to what he stated was the rising number of anti-Semitic incidents in the country, said he could "no longer recommend Jews wear a kippah at every time and place in Germany." Many Jewish leaders in the community were supportive of Klein, but some prominent politicians, Jewish leaders, and national media responded negatively. Senior government leaders continued to condemn anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. Seven additional state governments appointed anti-Semitism commissioners for the first time, bringing the total number of states with such commissioners to 13 (out of 16), in addition to the federal Jewish life and anti-Semitism commissioner. In July the government announced it would increase social welfare funding for Holocaust survivors by 44 million euros (\$49.4 million) in 2020, including for the first time pension payments to Holocaust survivors' widowed spouses.

There were numerous reports of anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents. These included assaults, verbal harassment, threats, discrimination, and vandalism. Jews expressed security concerns after several widely publicized anti-Semitic acts, including a gunman's attack in Halle on Yom Kippur that killed two individuals outside a synagogue. Federal crime statistics for 2018 cited 1,799 anti-Semitic crimes during the year, an overall increase of 20 percent from 2017. Sixty-nine of those crimes involved violence. The federal crime statistics attributed 89 percent of anti-Semitic crimes in 2018 to the far right; however, the federal anti-Semitism commissioner expressed concern over methodology that attributed to the far right all incidents in which the perpetrator was not identified. He stated that the country's Jewish community experienced more open hostility from Muslims than from other groups. Demonstrations occurred expressing anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiment. The Roman Catholic Church and the

Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) continued to make public statements opposing the COS.

The U.S. embassy and five consulates general assessed the government's responses to incidents of religious intolerance; expressed concerns about anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and anti-Muslim acts; and advocated for more law enforcement and other resources to prevent violent attacks on religious communities. In November the Secretary of State visited the synagogue in Halle to pay his respects and the Neue Synagoge in Berlin to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the *Reichs Pogromnacht* (previously known as *Kristallnacht*/Night of Broken Glass). Embassy representatives met with the federal anti-Semitism commissioner at the Ministry of Interior and the federal commissioner for global freedom of religion at the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development; consuls general met with state-level government representatives and anti-Semitism commissioners. The embassy and consulates general maintained a dialogue with a broad spectrum of religious communities and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on their concerns about religious freedom and on ways to promote tolerance and communication among religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 80.3 million (midyear 2019 estimate). Unofficial estimates based on the census and figures provided by religious groups indicate approximately 28 percent of the population is Catholic, and 26 percent belongs to the EKD – a confederation of Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), and United (Prussian Union) Protestant regional churches. Other Protestant denominations, including the New Apostolic Church, Baptist communities, and nondenominational Christians, account for approximately 1 percent of the population. Orthodox Christians represent 1.9 percent of the population.

According to government estimates, approximately 5.3 percent of the population is Muslim, of which 75 percent is Sunni, 13 percent Alevi, and 7 percent Shia; the remainder includes Alawites (70,000), Ahmadis (35,000), and Sufis (10,000). Intelligence officials estimate there are approximately 11,300 Salafi Muslims in the country. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 25 percent of Muslims are recent immigrants; between 2011 and 2015, an estimated 1.2 million Muslim immigrants entered the country. Estimates of the Jewish population vary widely; the Central Council of Jews estimates it at 100,000, while other estimates place the number at approximately 200,000 when including Jews who do not

belong to a specific Jewish community. According to the secular NGO Religious Studies Media and Information Service (REMID), Buddhists (270,000); Jehovah's Witnesses (169,000); Hindus (100,000); Yezidis (100,000); The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) (40,000); Sikhs (10,000-15,000); and Church of Scientology (COS) (3,400) together constitute less than 1 percent of the population. All of REMID's estimates are based on members who have registered with a religious group. According to the nonprofit Research Group Worldviews Germany, approximately 39 percent of the population either has no religious affiliation or belongs to religious groups not counted in government statistics.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious opinion and provides for freedom of faith and conscience, freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, and freedom to practice one's religion. It also prohibits an official state church. It stipulates no one shall be required to disclose his or her religious convictions, nor be compelled to participate in religious acts. The constitution states religious instruction shall be part of the curriculum in public schools, and parents have the right to decide whether their children receive religious instruction. It recognizes the right to establish private denominational schools. The constitution guarantees the freedom to form religious societies and permits groups to organize themselves for private religious purposes without constraint. It allows registered religious groups with Public Law Corporation (PLC) status to receive public subsidies from the states and to provide religious services in the military, at hospitals, and in prisons.

The federal criminal code prohibits calling for violence, inciting hatred or taking arbitrary measures against religious groups or their members. Violations are punishable by up to five years in prison. It also prohibits "assaulting the human dignity of religious groups or their members by insulting, maliciously maligning, or defaming them," specifying a maximum penalty of five years in prison, although prison sentences are rare. The prohibition and penalties apply equally to online speech. The federal criminal code prohibits disturbing religious services or acts of worship, with violators subject to a fine or imprisonment for up to three years. The law bans Nazi propaganda, Holocaust denial, and fomenting racial hatred, specifying a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment.

By law, social media companies with more than two million registered users in the country must implement procedures to review complaints and remove or block access to illegal speech within seven days of receiving a complaint and within 24 hours for cases considered “manifestly unlawful.” Noncompliance may result in fines of up to 50 million euros (\$56.2 million). Unlawful content includes actions illegal under existing criminal code, such as defamation of religions and denial of historic atrocities.

The law permits the federal government to characterize “nontraditional” religious groups – such as the Church of Scientology – as “sects,” “youth religions,” and “youth sects,” and allows the government to provide “accurate information” or warnings about them to the public. The law does not permit the government to use terms, such as “destructive,” “pseudo-religious,” or “manipulative” when referring to these groups. Several court decisions have ruled the government must remain neutral toward a religion and may provide a warning to the public only if an “offer” by a religious group would endanger the basic rights of an individual or place the individual in a state of physical or financial dependence.

Religious groups wishing to qualify as nonprofit associations with tax-exempt status must register. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status; if challenged, their decisions are subject to judicial review. Those applying for tax-exempt status must provide evidence they are a religious group through their statutes, history, and activities.

A special partnership exists between the states and religious groups with PLC status, as outlined in the constitution. Any religious group may request PLC status, which, if granted, entitles the group to levy tithes (8 percent of income tax in Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, 9 percent in the other states) on members, who must register their religious affiliation with federal tax authorities. Each state collects the tithes on behalf of the religious community through the state’s tax collection process, separately from and in addition to income taxes. PLCs pay fees to the government for the tithing service, but not all groups with PLC status utilize the service. PLC status also allows for benefits, including tax exemptions (larger than those given to groups with nonprofit status), representation on supervisory boards of public television and radio stations, and the right to special labor regulations. State governments subsidize institutions with PLC status, which provide public services, such as religious schools and hospitals. Additionally, due to historic “state-church contracts” dating back to pre-1919 Germany, all state governments except for Bremen and Hamburg subsidize the Catholic Church and the EKD with different yearly amounts.

According to the constitution, the decision to grant PLC status is made at the state level. Individual states base PLC status decisions on a number of varying qualifications, including an assurance of the group's permanence, size, and respect for the constitutional order and fundamental rights of individuals. An estimated 180 religious groups have PLC status, including Catholics, the EKD, Baha'is, Baptists, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Mennonites, Methodists, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventists. Ahmadi Muslim groups have PLC status in the states of Hesse and Hamburg; no other Muslim communities have PLC status. The COS does not have PLC or nonprofit status in any state.

Federal animal protection laws prohibit the killing of animals without anesthesia, including as part of halal and kosher slaughter practices. Pursuant to a Federal Administrative Court decision, however, trained personnel may kill animals without anesthesia in a registered slaughterhouse under observation of the local veterinary inspection office if the meat is for consumption only by members of religious communities whose beliefs require slaughtering animals without anesthesia.

According to a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court, general headscarf bans for teachers at public schools are a violation of religious freedom, but implementation is left to the states, which may determine if special circumstances apply. Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), and Saarland States render decisions on a case-by-case basis. Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Bremen, and Lower Saxony do not prohibit headscarves for teachers. Hesse permits teachers to wear headscarves as long as doing so does not impair "school peace" or threaten perceptions of state neutrality. A law in Berlin bans visible signs of religious affiliation for police, lawyers, judges, law enforcement staff, and primary and secondary public school teachers. The Berlin law permits teachers at some categories of institutions, such as vocational schools, to wear headscarves. Other states have laws that restrict religious attire in certain circumstances.

Citing safety reasons and the need for traffic law enforcement, federal law prohibits the concealment of faces while driving, including by a *niqab*. Infractions are punishable by a 60 euro (\$67) fine.

According to federal law, religious groups may appoint individuals with special training to carry out circumcision of males under the age of six months. After six

months, the law states circumcisions must be performed in a “medically professional manner” and without unnecessary pain.

All states offer religious instruction and ethics courses in public schools. Religious communities with PLC status (or those without such status that have concluded a special agreement with the state granting them this right) appoint religion teachers and work with the states to ensure the curriculum is in line with the constitution; the states pay the teachers’ salaries. Most public schools offer the option of Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in cooperation with those Churches, as well as instruction in Judaism if enough students (usually 12, although regulations vary by state) express an interest. Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Berlin, Hesse, Lower Saxony, NRW, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, and Schleswig-Holstein States also offer some religious instruction in Islam. In most of the federal states, Muslim communities or associations provide this instruction, while in Bavaria and Schleswig-Holstein, the state does. In March the Bavarian cabinet decided to expand its program, which at the time reached 16,500 pupils at 350 schools. In Hamburg and Bremen, nondenominational religious instruction is offered for all students by the Protestant Church and the state, respectively.

Students who do not wish to participate in religious instruction may opt out; in some states, those who opt out may substitute ethics courses. State authorities generally permit religious groups to establish private schools as long as they meet basic curriculum requirements. Schooling is constitutionally mandated, and homeschooling, including for religious reasons, is prohibited in all states.

The government provides annual payments to Holocaust victims and their descendants, and regularly expands the scope of these programs to broaden the eligibility requirements.

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

Government Practices

In February Federal Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism Felix Klein launched a nationwide online platform for reporting anti-Semitic incidents, including those that do not rise to the level of a crime. The Research and Information Center for Anti-Semitism (RIAS), a nonprofit organization that receives some federal and state funding and that had already been managing a similar service in Berlin, is responsible for running the program.

In September, in response to several anti-Semitic attacks in Berlin, Klein called for harsher penalties for such attacks. He also recommended additional training for police and prosecutors to help them recognize and appropriately deal with anti-Semitic incidents. Klein criticized the police procedure of automatically classifying anti-Semitic incidents in which the perpetrator is unknown as right-wing extremism, a practice that resulted in 89 percent of anti-Semitic incidents being classified as right-wing. Klein said the country's Jewish community experienced more open hostility from Muslims than from right-wing extremists.

In July the federal Interior Ministry announced the creation of a new advisory committee to combat anti-Semitism. The eight-member committee has the mandate to support Klein's work by formulating strategies to identify fields of action against anti-Semitism and to increase the visibility of Jewish life in the country.

During the year, Berlin, Brandenburg, Thuringia, Saarland, Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Lower Saxony States established state-level anti-Semitism commissioners, bringing the total number of states with such commissioners to 13 (out of 16). The responsibilities and functions of the position vary by state but generally include developing contacts with the Jewish community, collecting statistics on anti-Semitic incidents, and designing education and prevention programs. Klein urged all states to establish anti-Semitism commissioners because the distribution of powers in the country's federal system provides the states with greater authority to combat anti-Semitism.

All 16 state interior ministers and Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer presented a new plan in October to combat anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism that included a stricter weapons law, an obligation to report hate speech online, increased protection for Jewish institutions, fast-tracking anti-Semitism cases, and hundreds of new personnel positions for the federal criminal police (BKA) and the federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC – domestic intelligence agency) for such cases. Seehofer had previously advocated similar measures without success, but the attack in Halle provided new urgency and led to additional support for his plan.

On November 29 the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) approved a motion to amend a section in the country's penal code that includes anti-Semitism in the list of aggravating criteria, along with "racist, xenophobic, and inhumane motives," for judges to consider in determining the severity of sentences. The previous day,

Federal Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht separately said she would support such legislation. At year's end, the Bundestag had not yet voted on the proposed change.

In May the federal parliament passed a nonbinding resolution designating the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel as anti-Semitic. The resolution stated the government would not fund organizations that question Israel's right to exist or actively support BDS. This resolution replaced the parliament's January 2018 resolution to "counter" BDS.

In January Schleswig-Holstein established a new, independent "Statewide Office for Information on and Documentation of Anti-Semitism." In March the Hesse Ministry of Education began a statewide anti-Semitism prevention project to organize workshops and training events for students and teachers. In April the Bavarian anti-Semitism commissioner established a registration office for anti-Semitic incidents, modeled after RIAS Berlin, and in November the Baden-Wuerttemberg anti-Semitism commissioner did the same.

In July Duesseldorf appointed a commissioner as part of a comprehensive plan to fight anti-Semitism, and the public prosecutor's offices in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart added anti-Semitism officers. In July the Baden-Wuerttemberg State anti-Semitism commissioner published his first report to the state parliament, which warned of conspiracy theories targeting Jews, and detailed 87 anti-Semitic offenses in the first nine months of 2018, a 38 percent increase compared with 2017. In July the NRW State anti-Semitism commissioner presented a plan to establish a reporting office for anti-Semitic attacks. She also called for new educational programs to combat anti-Semitic attitudes and stereotypes.

According to the first annual report by Berlin Anti-Semitism Commissioner Claudia Vanoni, law enforcement authorities there initiated 386 proceedings with an anti-Semitic background during the year, 156 involving online cases. At year's end, 169 of the overall cases were terminated because the perpetrators could not be identified, and 27 were concluded – most of which resulted in fines. Investigations in 49 cases were ongoing at the end of the year.

In May federal anti-Semitism commissioner Klein said – in response to what he stated was the rising number of anti-Semitic incidents in the county – he could "no longer recommend Jews wear a kippah at every time and place in Germany." Many Jewish leaders in the community were supportive of Klein, but prominent politicians and national media responded negatively. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas

said, “No one should ever have to hide their Jewish faith again – not in Germany nor anywhere else,” while government spokesperson Stefan Seibert said, “The state has to ensure the free exercise of religion is possible for everyone, and thus it’s the job of the state to ensure that anyone can move around securely with a kippah in any place in our country.” Klein then called on individuals everywhere in the country to wear a kippah in solidarity with Jews on June 1 during the annual anti-Israel al-Quds demonstration in Berlin.

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in the NRW State Parliament introduced a resolution in April 2018 to deny PLC status to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat community, which it asserted was working “towards the establishment of a theocratic order of rule.” Following a January hearing, all other parties in the state parliament rejected the motion in May, stating that only the State Chancellery had the authority to grant or reject PLC status. At the end of the year, the State Chancellery had yet to make a decision on the Ahmadiyya application, which was submitted in early 2018.

In April Rhineland-Palatinate signed a state agreement with the Muslim Alevite community outlining conditions for Alevi holidays and religious instruction in schools. Four Rhineland-Palatinate elementary schools offered Alevi religious instruction.

In June the Federal Labor Court ruled a physician employed in a Catholic hospital in Duesseldorf should not have been fired in 2009. He was dismissed because the hospital stated his remarriage without an annulment of a previous marriage was a violation of canon law. The press spokesman of the Archdiocese of Cologne said the country’s Catholic Church liberalized its labor law in 2015, and the dismissal would likely not take place today.

According to reports from the federal OPC and Scientology members, the federal and state OPCs in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, NRW, and Thuringia continued to monitor the activities of the COS, reportedly by evaluating Scientology publications and members’ public activities to determine whether they violated the constitution. At least four major political parties – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), and Free Democratic Party (FDP) – continued to exclude Scientologists from party membership. “Sect filters,” signed statements by potential employees to confirm they had no contact with the COS, remained in use in the public and private sectors. The COS said the government also discriminated against firms owned or operated by its members.

In July the UN special rapporteurs on minority issues and freedom of religion or belief wrote the government to ask for its response to allegations of “continued use of discriminatory (sect filters) against Scientologists in government grants and employment.” In its response in September, the government cited a 1995 ruling by the Federal Labor Court that stated the COS did not qualify as a religious community under German law, COS goals were geared toward commercial activities, and the COS had “aspirations opposing the free democratic constitutional system,” making it ineligible for government grants and contracts. According to the government, the COS therefore was not eligible for religious protections and use of the sect filters was not a violation of human rights. Also in September, the COS asked the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to “investigate” the practice of sect filters in the country and to “assist in promoting a real dialogue” between the COS and the government on the issue.

In May, responding to a parliamentary inquiry, the NRW State OPC disclosed it was monitoring 109 mosques for extremist activities. Based on the monitoring, authorities identified 156 individuals as “relevant persons” and 260 as “potentially dangerous.” Of these, 127 of the “relevant” and 110 of the “potentially dangerous” were considered capable of action because they were present in the country and not in detention.

Federal and state OPCs continued to monitor numerous Muslim groups, including the terrorist groups ISIS, Hezbollah, and Hamas, as well as groups such as Turkish Hezbollah (TH), Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jama’at, Millatu Ibrahim, the Islamic Center Hamburg (IZH), the Muslim Brotherhood, Milli Gorus, and various Salafist movements. The director of NRW’s OPC stated in June that the Muslim Brotherhood was recruiting members among the refugee community and represented a “greater threat to democracy” than the Salafists.

Groups under OPC observation continued to say the OPC scrutiny implied they were extremist, and it constrained their ability to apply for publicly funded projects.

At a May 14 conference, entitled “European Network: Combating Anti-Semitism through Education,” hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated Germany would prioritize the fight against anti-Semitism when it assumes the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2020.

In June unknown perpetrators desecrated 50 copies of the Quran at Bremen's Rama Mosque by throwing them into toilets. Bremen Mayor Carsten Sieling said the Bremen Senate was "thoroughly appalled" by the "disgusting crime," and the Senate stood firmly with Bremen's Muslim citizens. Local politicians attended Islamic Friday prayers to show their solidarity.

In September the Higher Administrative Court agreed to hear the city of Oer-Erkenschwick's appeal of the 2018 decision by an Administrative Court in NRW State banning a local mosque's outdoor amplification of the call to prayer. The case was still pending at the end of the year.

In March the Bavarian Constitutional Court upheld the state's ban on judges and prosecutors wearing headscarves, kippahs, or crosses but found the display of crosses in courtrooms to be acceptable.

In June the Rhineland-Palatinate Superior Administrative Court overturned the city of Koblenz's ban on burkinis, an all-encompassing swimsuit worn by some Muslim women. The court ruled the ban violated the constitution's call for equal treatment of all persons. In July the Federal Administrative Court ruled Sikhs were not exempt from the requirement to wear a helmet while riding a motorcycle, even though helmets do not fit over their turbans.

In October the Higher Administration Court in Muenster denied state compensation to two headscarf-wearing Muslim teachers who claimed professional disadvantages because of their religious beliefs. The court determined it could not be demonstrated that the state refused to offer them employment due to religious reasons.

In March the EKD-sponsored charity *Diakonie* appealed to the Federal Constitutional Court to reverse a 2018 ruling by the Federal Labor Court that prevented *Diakonie* from denying employment to a social worker because she was not a member of a Christian church. The case was pending at the end of the year.

In January the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled German authorities at the local level did not violate a Christian family's human rights when they placed the family's children in foster care for three weeks in 2013. The family from Darmstadt had argued German authorities were in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights when they refused to allow them to homeschool their four children through a Christian distance-learning program. The ECHR ruled authorities were justified in removing the children from their home,

and it was reasonable to assume the parents were endangering their children by not sending them to school because the children were isolated and had no contact with anyone outside the family.

In May Federal Minister for Migration, Refugees, and Integration Annette Widmann-Mauz called on the government to examine whether it could legally institute a ban on headscarves for children in schools. The president of the German Teachers' Association supported a headscarf ban, calling them "hostile to integration."

In January the state government of Baden-Wuerttemberg established a Sunni Muslim educational foundation to serve as a mediator between the state and various Islamic associations. This action followed the 2018 announcement that the Baden-Wuerttemberg State government planned to reorganize Islamic religious education in public schools. Two of the larger Muslim organizations – the Turkish-Islamic Union DITIB (connected to the Turkish government's religious affairs ministry) and the Islamic Religious Community Baden-Wuerttemberg – refused to participate, saying they considered the arrangement unconstitutional.

In September an administrative court in Hesse State ruled state-run Islamic studies lessons in schools would be constitutional under national law. The case was in response to the state's decision to phase out cooperation with DITIB because of its ties to the Turkish government and move to a purely state-run program.

Officials in Hesse continued to investigate a possible neo-Nazi network in Frankfurt's police force, first discovered in December 2018. At year's end, six police officers had been dismissed from duty as a result of the scandal. Overall, 38 officers were under investigation.

In September the Saarland State Education Ministry announced it would extend its cooperation with several Islamic associations that provide Islamic religious education in four public schools through at least 2023. The ministry also announced plans to expand the program to additional schools.

In February the Rhineland-Palatinate State youth welfare office revoked the operating license of the Al-Nur Kindergarten in Mainz – the state's only Muslim day care center – due to its alleged promotion of Salafism and connections with extremist groups, citing the Muslim Brotherhood as an example. Al-Nur was told to cease operations by March 31, and that the city of Mainz would stop funding the

facility. The Mainz Administrative Court upheld the decision, as did the Koblenz Higher Administrative Court on appeal.

In May Berlin Humboldt University, a public university, announced the initial cohort of students at its institute for Islamic theology would not be eligible to become religion teachers because the lack of Islamic religion classes at Berlin's middle and high schools would prevent them from completing the internship required to become a teacher. These students, however, still could become imams or work in other religious capacities. The Islamic theology institute was established in the fall of 2018 to train future imams and religion teachers.

In April experts estimated NRW lacked more than 2,000 teachers for Islamic religious education. Only two universities in NRW offered courses to obtain the required teaching permit, and just 251 teachers in NRW had such a permit. There are more than 400,000 Muslim students in NRW, but only approximately 20,000 of them have received Islamic religious education.

In July the NRW state government opened a coordination office for Muslim engagement to reorganize its relations with a broad range of Muslim organizations and civil society groups. DITIB was included among the organizations, even though NRW previously ceased all cooperation with DITIB, stating it would reinstate relations only if DITIB took steps to reduce the Turkish government's influence over its activities. At the end of the year, the state government had yet to resume any further cooperation with DITIB beyond the new coordination office.

In July the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany (also known as the Jewish Claims Conference) and the government announced an increase of 44 million euros (\$49.4 million) in government funding for social welfare services for Holocaust survivors, raising the yearly contribution from 480 million euros (\$539.3 million) in 2019 to 524 million euros (\$588.8 million) in 2020. For the first time, pension payments will be extended to Holocaust survivors' widowed spouses, and these payments are to be applied retroactively.

The government continued to subsidize some Jewish groups. Based on an agreement between the federal government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the federal government contributed 13 million euros (\$14.6 million) to help maintain Jewish cultural heritage and support integration and social work. In addition, the federal government provided financial support to the Institute for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, the Rabbi Seminar at the University of Potsdam, and

the Leo Baeck Institute, an international group researching the history and culture of German Jewry.

State governments continued to provide funds to Jewish communities and organizations in various amounts for such purposes as the renovation and construction of synagogues. The federal government continued to cover 50 percent of maintenance costs for Jewish cemeteries. State and local police units continued to provide security for synagogues and other Jewish institutions

According to the Humanistic Union, an independent civil liberties organization, total state government contributions during the year to the Catholic Church and the EKD totaled approximately 548.7 million euros (\$616.5 million). The union said it calculated its estimate based on budgets of the 16 states.

In May the Wuppertal Regional Court fined seven men from 300 to 1,800 euros (\$340-\$2000) each for wearing yellow vests marked “Sharia Police” and patrolling the streets in 2014 to counter “non-Muslim” behavior. They were charged with wearing uniforms as expressions of a common political opinion. A regional court acquitted the men in 2016, but the Federal Constitutional Court reversed the acquittal in 2018. The defendants appealed to the Constitutional Court in June, and the case was pending at the end of the year.

In April media reported on a police cadet in NRW State who was fired because of his close contacts with Salafists and his extremist views. The police headquarters in Bielefeld refused to offer the Muslim man tenure as a police detective at the end of his three-year training.

The government continued the German Islam Conference dialogue with Muslims in the country, which began in 2006. The dialogue’s aim was to improve the religious and social participation of the Muslim population, give greater recognition to Muslims’ contributions to society, and – in the absence of a central organization representing all Muslims in the country – further develop partnerships between the government and Muslim organizations.

The states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Wuerttemberg held conferences for law enforcement officials in August and September, respectively, to discuss methods to better prevent and police anti-Semitism. The events were largely aimed at awareness-raising. In both states, more than 150 members of the security services, state and local governments, and the Jewish community gathered for the events.

In August media reported local authorities would not allow a Brazilian Pentecostal congregation to purchase the former Protestant church building it had been renting in Berlin since 2016 as the headquarters for the denomination's branches in Germany and Austria. District Mayor Stephan von Dassel vowed to continue blocking the sale to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), whose message he described as "People should donate a lot of money to the church, then their problems will just go away." Von Dassel was also quoted in the media, stating, "The UCKG enriches neither our neighborhood nor its surroundings." The most recent deed of sale specified the church could be resold only with the approval of city administrators.

In September the city of Dortmund and the national jury for the award rescinded the awarding of the Nelly Sachs Prize, one of the country's most renowned literary prizes, to author Kamila Shamsie due to her membership in the BDS movement. Also in September, the Aachen Art Association announced it would rescind the prize it awarded to artist Walid Raad due to his support for the BDS movement, but it reversed that decision in October after determining he had not engaged in any anti-Semitic behavior. The mayor of Aachen responded to the reversal by withdrawing the city from the award ceremony and criticized Raad's involvement in a "cultural boycott of Israel."

In April then-defense minister Ursula von der Leyen announced the military would begin appointing Jewish and Muslim chaplains, adding, "Especially in times when anti-Semitism, religious polarization, and bigotry are on the march, this is an important signal." For Jews, ordination as a rabbi is a requirement, while Muslim candidates will need a diploma in Islamic theology from a German university and must undergo a security check.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were numerous reports of anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents, including assaults, verbal harassment, threats, discrimination, and vandalism. According to Ministry of Interior federal crime statistics, there were 1,799 anti-Semitic crimes committed during 2018 (the most recent statistics available). These included 69 incidents involving violence, a 20 percent increase compared with the 1,504 anti-Semitic crimes, of which 37 were violent, reported in 2017.

On October 9, a gunman attacked the synagogue in the eastern city of Halle on Yom Kippur, where approximately 50 individuals were attending a prayer service. When the gunman failed to gain entrance to the locked building, he shot and killed two persons outside the synagogue in a snack bar. He was arrested shortly after the attack. The federal public prosecutor's investigation of the suspect's background and motives was ongoing at year's end, but according to media reports he admitted to the investigating authorities he harbored far-right extremist political sympathies. Several prominent Jewish organizations called for police protection at all synagogues during services. Leading government officials, including Chancellor Merkel, Federal President Steinmeier, and Foreign Minister Maas, promised a more determined fight against anti-Semitism and far-right violent extremism.

The federal OPC's annual report stated the number of violent right-wing anti-Semitic incidents increased from 28 in 2017 to 48 in 2018. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer stated, "We can find in almost all areas of far-right extremism hostile attitudes toward Jews ... It's a development that we must take very, very, very seriously." According to the report, membership in right-wing extremist parties, such as the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD), decreased from approximately 6,000 in 2017 to 5,500 persons in 2018.

In May the BKA presented its annual statistics, which indicated 36,062 politically motivated crimes in 2018, an 8.7 percent decrease from 2017. The BKA report covers a broader definition of "politically motivated crime" than does the MOI in its separate annual report. Notwithstanding the general downward trend, anti-Semitic crimes increased 19.6 percent. Moreover, crimes registered as being motivated by racism or xenophobia increased 22 percent, and the overall number of politically motivated crimes was the third-highest since these statistics were first reported in 2000.

The NGO RIAS, to which victims may report anti-Semitic incidents independent of filing charges with police, reported 404 anti-Semitic incidents in Berlin in the first six months of the year, compared with 579 incidents over the same period in 2018. This included 33 incidents involving violence or threatened violence (down from 47) and 46 online hate speech postings (down from 73). RIAS used categories different from official police statistics and counted anti-Semitic incidents that did not rise to the level of a criminal offense. According to RIAS, the largest motivating factor for anti-Semitic attacks was right-wing political ideology.

At a May 16 conference hosted by several German NGOs working to combat anti-Semitism, participants said anti-Semitism “is now expressed more openly in Germany” than it was two years ago. Head of the Central Council of Jews Dr. Josef Schuster described the rise in anti-Semitic incidents as “alarming,” but said the increase may be due in part to the increased options victims of anti-Semitism have for reporting incidents and crimes. Head of Berlin's Anne Frank Center Patrick Siegele cited a study by Bielefeld University indicating Jews aged 16-29 experienced more severe anti-Semitic stereotypes compared with previous generations – a significant change in recent years. Head Manager of the Ministry of Family's “Living Democracy” program Thomas Heppener described how the program provided funding to NGOs fighting anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. He said the ministry failed to place appropriate emphasis on countering right-wing extremism as a main source of anti-Semitism in its 2015 round of funding and vowed to address this in its 2020 programming.

In April the federal OPC published a report titled “Anti-Semitism in Islamism,” which stated, “Anti-Semitic events with an Islamic background are not uncommon in Germany.” According to the report, while anti-Semitism was traditionally linked to the far right, it was also widespread in the social and political center of society. The report noted the arrival of more than a million Muslims in the country between 2014 and 2017 increased the significance of Islamic anti-Semitism. The report stated anti-Semitic ideas were increasingly prevalent among Muslims who were not members of Islamist organizations.

In January the Hamburg Senate reported 74 anti-Semitic crimes in 2018 – up from 44 in 2017 and 35 in 2016. The Saxony-Anhalt state minister of interior reported anti-Semitic crimes in the state rose from 54 in 2017 to 62 in 2018.

In 2018 the Ministry of Interior registered 910 incidents targeting Muslims and Muslim institutions, such as mosques or community centers, including 74 attacks involving bodily harm. This was a decrease from the 1,075 incidents in 2017. The Ministry of Interior classified 92 percent of these incidents as right-wing extremism, although this included incidents in which the perpetrators were unknown. Other recorded infractions included online hate speech against Muslims, hate mail, and aggressive behavior in the street.

The Ministry of Interior counted 121 incidents against Christians in 2018, including 11 cases involving violence, a slight decline from the 129 incidents in

2017. The Ministry of Interior classified 39 percent of these incidents as motivated by religious ideology and 35 percent as motivated by right-wing ideology.

In March the Duesseldorf Regional Court sentenced an Iraqi asylum seeker to three years and 10 months in prison for stabbing an Iranian in 2017, causing life-threatening injuries. The alleged motive was the Iranian's conversion to Christianity, although the Iraqi denied this.

In May a 27-year-old man shouted anti-Muslim slurs at two teenagers in a tram in Bremen before stabbing one of them in the neck with a knife. The suspect confessed to the stabbing after he was arrested and was taken to a medical center for psychiatric examination.

In March the regional court found three young men guilty of arson for attacking a mosque in Lauffen-am-Neckar, Baden-Wuerttemberg in 2018 and sentenced them to between two and a half and three years in prison.

There were four reported incidents of arson in churches. During the night of May 18, unknown individuals broke a church window with stones, broke several sacred objects, and burned a statue of Jesus in the Church of the Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit in Grossholbach. On the same night, police discovered a tablecloth and church balcony were burned in St. Blasii's Evangelical Church in Nordhausen. A fire in St. Nikolaus Catholic Church in Ankum was discovered on June 1. On July 29, a fire was set at St. Magnus Church at Schussenried Abbey in Bad Schussenried. Pictures and a wooden cross were damaged. Police began investigations of all the cases, which were pending at year's end.

In separate incidents in Berlin in June, two young Jewish men were assaulted. A 23-year-old U.S. citizen tourist was harassed by three individuals, one of whom hit him in the face. Police were investigating the attack as an anti-Semitic crime. Days earlier, a 20-year-old man wearing a kippah was harassed and the perpetrator tried to spit on him. Both cases were under investigation at the end of the year.

In October a German with Palestinian roots was sentenced for incitement of hate, insult, coercion, bodily harm, and fare evasion following his anti-Semitic assault on a university professor visiting Bonn in July 2018. Added to an already existing sentence for robbery, the attacker was sentenced to a total of four years, six months. In March local media reported the suspension of criminal proceedings against four police detectives for allegedly using excessive force against a Jewish victim during an incident; they had originally mistaken him for the attacker. The

officers faced an internal investigation, but prosecutors denied the victim's request to provide testimony to the investigation, and the officers returned to regular duty without charges.

In June Hamburg Chief Rabbi Shlomo Bistritzky and a senior member of the Jewish community were threatened by a reportedly mentally unstable man of Moroccan descent at city hall. On June 27, the Hamburg mayor and the rabbi launched a new initiative to oppose anti-Semitism and discrimination.

In June a rabbi in Duesseldorf was threatened by a passerby. In July a prominent American rabbi and community leader in Berlin was spat on and insulted while walking home from a synagogue with his son. In August another rabbi was insulted and then pushed to the ground by two unidentified suspects in Berlin. Also in August, a rabbi and his two sons were insulted and spat on while leaving a synagogue in Munich.

In June unknown perpetrators desecrated 20 gravestones and a wall with Nazi graffiti at the Jewish cemetery of Gotha, Thuringia State. Mayor Knut Kreuch led a moment of silence during the city council meeting, and investigations by local authorities were ongoing at the end of the year.

The Catholic Church and the EKD continued to oppose the COS publicly. "Sect commissioners" or "departments on sects and worldview matters" of the EKD and the Catholic Church investigated "sects and cults" and publicized what they considered to be the dangers of these groups. On its website, the EKD Center for Questions of World Views warned the public about what it said were the dangers posed by multiple religious groups, including the COS, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Bhagwan-Osho, Transcendental Meditation, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Universal Life, and continued to produce literature criticizing these groups.

According to the Pew Research Global Attitudes Survey released in October, 24 percent of respondents in the country expressed unfavorable opinions of Muslims, while 6 percent expressed unfavorable opinions of Jews.

In May the European Commission (EC) carried out a study in each EU member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 43 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the country, while 52 percent said it was rare; 64 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religious belief than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 87 percent said they would be

comfortable working closely with a Christian, and 79 percent said they would be with an atheist, 77 percent with a Jew, 74 percent with a Buddhist, and 68 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if a child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 85 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 73 percent if atheist, 71 percent if Jewish, 66 percent if Buddhist, and 51 percent if Muslim.

In January the EC published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each EU-member state. According to the survey, 66 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in the country, and 61 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 71 percent; on the internet, 67 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 62 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 64 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 63 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 64 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 48 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 50 percent; and anti-Semitism in the media, 43 percent.

In November the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country’s residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were “probably true” or “probably false.” The proportion agreeing that various statements were “probably true” was: 49 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Germany; 27 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 42 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

In July a study by the Bertelsmann Foundation found many Germans had negative perceptions of Islam. The study found respondents believed Islam’s beliefs and stance toward other religions could be harmful to democracy in the long run. Half of the interviewees perceived Islam as a threat. This sentiment was stronger in the east, where 30 percent of respondents said they did not want Muslims as neighbors, compared with 16 percent who expressed the same preference in western German states.

According to media reports, women who wore the hijab continued to face employment discrimination.

In September a research project at the University Duisburg-Essen published results from a survey of students on anti-Muslim sentiment and its causes among youth.

The survey indicated young persons with no interaction with Muslims who drew their knowledge about them from social media were likely to develop stereotypical and negative views of Muslims. Students who interacted with Muslim peers were more critical of negative media reports and had lower levels of anti-Muslim sentiment.

The far-right group Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA) continued to organize weekly demonstrations in Dresden, although media reports indicated significantly fewer demonstrators than in previous years. There were approximately 3,000 PEGIDA marchers on October 20 for the fifth anniversary of the group's first demonstration, but they were outnumbered by the more than 5,000 counterdemonstrators. Amid calls to curb immigration, PEGIDA supporters regularly expressed anti-Muslim sentiments during the rallies, including by carrying posters expressing opposition to women who wear religious head coverings. In May the public prosecutor's office in Saxony State reported it had initiated 198 preliminary proceedings against speakers and supporters of PEGIDA between 2014 and 2018; the most frequent crimes were assault and battery and the display of symbols of unconstitutional organizations.

In October the Dresden City Council declared a Nazi emergency. Local politician Max Aschenbach initiated the measure in response to rising levels of right-wing extremist attitudes and actions, saying, "Politics must finally begin to ostracize that and say: No, that's unacceptable." The resolution called on the city and civil society organizations to strengthen a democratic culture, protect minority and human rights, and help the victims of right-wing violence.

An estimated 23 churches continued to use bells with Nazi symbols and inscriptions. One person filed a criminal complaint on February 2, accusing a Protestant church in Thuringia State of violating a ban on the use of Nazi symbols by using six bells with Nazi symbols in five churches. The individual said he repeatedly asked the church to stop using the bells but was ignored. Thuringia's Jewish community had complained about the six Nazi bells in January. A church spokesman told the KNA news agency that regional leaders had written to churches using the bells and organized a meeting in April to discuss the issue. In May the public prosecutor's office in Erfurt, Thuringia State, declined to investigate the state bishop or the Protestant Church of Central Germany. The man who filed the February complaint appealed the public prosecutor's decision, and the case was pending at year's end.

In June approximately 1,200 participants marched in the annual al-Quds Day demonstration against Israel in Berlin, fewer than the 2,000 participants in 2018. Demonstrators called for the destruction of Israel and for Jerusalem to be returned to Muslims, and some displayed illegal signs or chanted prohibited slogans in support of the banned groups Hizballah or Hamas. Approximately 1,200 individuals took part in a counterdemonstration. Berlin Interior Senator Andreas Geisel said he regretted it was legally not possible to ban the demonstration. He advocated designating Hizballah a terrorist organization, which would enable him to ban future al-Quds Day marches.

In May the Hesse State OPC issued a warning about the “radicalization potential” of the group Realitaet Islam (Reality Islam). The OPC said the group rejected the country’s liberal democratic order and was striving for a theocracy.

Eighteen right-wing extremists, including members of the NPD and the far-right Wodans Erben Germanien (Odin’s Heirs Germania) group, marched past a refugee center in Nuremberg on the evening of February 23. Police identified the marchers and recorded their march, but after police departed, the demonstrators continued with lit torches to the former Nazi parade grounds in Nuremberg, an area used by Adolf Hitler for annual rallies from 1933 to 1938. The individuals filmed themselves and later released a video on the internet. Prosecutors were considering filing charges, according to Nuremberg mayor Ulrich Maly, who said, “This is an event that should alarm all of us across Germany and especially in Nuremberg – the fact that such symbols are used at places like this.” Police admitted they had failed to assess the group’s intentions correctly and preventive measures failed to keep the groups from using the “historically burdened” site to further their propaganda.

In April a militant neo-Nazi group distributed flyers at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. The flyers called for the killing of Muslims, imams, and rabbis and for “total civil war.” The group signed its flyers as “Atomwaffen (Atomic Weapons) Division Germany,” claiming ties to the U.S.-based network of the same name.

In August several soccer fans in Frankfurt hurled anti-Semitic insults at an Israeli referee during a Europa League qualifying match. The fans were escorted out of the match and at least one was banned from the stadium in the future.

In June politicians from the AfD were not invited to speak at the biannual German Protestant Church Assembly in Dortmund. High level representatives from other

main political parties were invited. The AfD's attendance at the event in 2017 led to protests. The AfD criticized the leadership of EKD for being biased.

In July two day care centers in Leipzig announced plans to remove all pork items from their lunch menus out of consideration for two Muslim children. The country's largest newspaper *Bild* reported on the change, which subsequently became a trending topic on social media. The centers received anonymous death threats, and police provided them with additional protection. The director of the centers announced in July he would put the plans on hold.

In May a bloody pig's head, plastic bags filled with blood, right-wing extremist slogans, and swastikas were found in front of the Arrahman Mosque in Moenchengladbach. Authorities investigated, but as of the end of the year had not filed any charges. The following weekend, approximately 260 protesters took part in a right-wing demonstration initiated by a representative of the "Alliance of Hooligans against Salafists" who was also a member of the Moenchengladbach City Council. A counterrally attracted approximately 325 marchers.

In July unidentified persons left excrement covered with pages torn from a Quran in the prayer room, as well as a torn and soiled Quran, in the mosque of the DITIB community in Minden, NRW State. Before the incident, the prayer room had been freely accessible to the public, but was since kept closed. A police investigation was ongoing at the end of the year.

In July the DITIB mosque in Duisburg, NRW State, received a bomb threat by email signed by the violent right-wing extremist network Combat 18. The mosque was evacuated and searched, but no explosives were found. In September the mosque received a second bomb threat. A police investigation was ongoing at year's end.

In July the DITIB Central Mosque in Cologne received a bomb threat by email signed by "Volksfront," which authorities believed to be an extreme right-wing organization that originated in the United States. The mosque complex, the largest in the country, was evacuated and searched, but no explosives were found. At year's end, authorities continued to investigate.

In March *Diakonie* and a local organization of Muslims in Duesseldorf launched a joint project to introduce Islamic customs to preschool children as a contribution to early childhood education. As part of the program, a Protestant pastor and an imam would visit the day care center together to promote religious tolerance.

Before the first event in April, *Diakonie* received threats and hate mail, including allegations the imam might hold radical views. The imam rejected the charge, and both *Diakonie* and the local Jewish community supported him. The preschool program was held as planned.

In May the Duisburg-based association “Jungs e.V.,” a group of young Muslims engaged in combatting anti-Semitism, received the inaugural Mevluede Genc Medal from the NRW state government. The state established the award in 2018 to recognize special services towards promoting tolerance, reconciliation between cultures, and the peaceful coexistence of religions.

In April the association Sekten-Info (Sect Info) NRW, a counseling service providing information about new religious and ideological communities, publicly warned against the Korean Shinchonji Bible movement, whose adherents were reportedly using psychological pressure and social isolation to recruit new members, especially near the university in Essen. The movement counted approximately 200 active members in the greater Ruhr region.

Volkswagen announced in June it would fund an ADL office in Berlin because of the rise of extremism, especially anti-Semitism, in Europe. At year’s end, the office had not yet opened, but ADL recognized Volkswagen for its “generous gift.”

In August, according to media reports, the Yezidi community inaugurated its first temple and cemetery in the country, in Augsburg.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. embassy and the five consulates continued to engage closely with authorities at all levels of government regarding responses to incidents of religious intolerance. The Ambassador and other embassy officials regularly met with Federal Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism Klein and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Federal Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion Markus Gruebel. The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate officials met regularly with a wide variety of federal and state parliamentarians to discuss religious freedom issues. Consulate officials in Frankfurt met with the commissioners for anti-Semitism in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hessen, and Rhineland-Palatinate to express concern about anti-Semitism and discuss ways of ensuring anti-Semitic incidents were correctly recorded. Consulate officials in Duesseldorf met with the commissioner for anti-Semitism in NRW State to discuss cooperation possibilities.

In November the Secretary of State visited Halle Synagogue to pay his respects following a Yom Kippur 2019 attack on the community, and the Neue Synagogue in Berlin to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the *Reichs Pogromnacht* (previously known as *Kristallnacht*/Night of Broken Glass) attacks committed by the Nazi regime against Jewish institutions in 1938. At Halle, the Secretary said, “The world must work together against this threat and this vicious attack against religious freedom, and in particular, religious freedom of the Jewish people.”

In October the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited Frankfurt, Berlin, Halle, and Munich and met with a wide range of government officials, advocates, and representatives of the Jewish community to discuss how best to combat anti-Semitism. In Frankfurt he met law enforcement officials from four states, including 30 high-ranking officials from state-level Interior and Justice Ministries, including police officers, state prosecutors, judges, and state anti-Semitism commissioners. In Halle the special envoy visited the synagogue a gunman had attempted to attack earlier in the month. In Munich he attended the International Meeting of Special Envoys & Coordinators Combating Anti-Semitism organized by the World Jewish Congress. The Ambassador hosted an event for the special envoy in Berlin, which was attended by law enforcement officials, politicians, Jewish NGOs, and other representatives of the Jewish community.

Embassy and consulate general representatives met with members and leaders of numerous local and national religious and civil society groups about their concerns related to tolerance and freedom of religion. Topics of discussion with Jewish groups included concerns about what they characterized as the growing acceptability of anti-Semitism through the country’s changing political landscape and concern that refugees and other migrants might be bringing concepts of anti-Semitism into the country. Embassy and consulate general representatives also discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom and tolerance with the Catholic, Evangelical, and other Protestant churches; COS; Central Council of Muslims; Association of Islamic Cultural Centers; the Central Council of Jews in Germany; Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany; the World Uyghur Congress; Alevi Muslims; Jehovah’s Witnesses; and human rights NGOs.

The Ambassador met frequently with NGOs and Jewish leaders to discuss how to combat rising anti-Semitism. In March he hosted a roundtable in Frankfurt with local community leaders, government officials, and civil society members engaged in the fight against anti-Semitism. The discussion centered on youth engagement

strategies and effective educational programs, accurately recording and quantifying the rise of anti-Semitic incidents, and the need for stricter laws to deter anti-Semitic incidents.

In April the Ambassador attended a memorial service on the 74th anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. In May the Ambassador took issue with federal Anti-Semitism Commissioner Klein's public statement that Jews should be wary of wearing kippahs at all times and in all places because of rising anti-Semitism in the country, writing on Twitter, "Wear your kippa. Wear your friend's kippa. Borrow a kippa and wear it for our Jewish neighbors." The Ambassador also spoke at a counterdemonstration to Berlin's annual al-Quds Day march in June, where he countered the anti-Semitic messaging of the event and called for the ban of Hezbollah in the country. In September he hosted a dinner in honor of the Middle East Peace Forum, during which participants discussed how to combat the BDS movement.

In March the Ambassador met with two members of the Kurdish community to discuss secular Islam, anti-Semitism, and extremism. He met with representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses community in July to discuss the difficulties Russian Jehovah's Witnesses encountered trying to obtain asylum in the country and the increased harassment they faced.

In January, as part of the embassy's broader engagement for International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a high-level embassy official held a roundtable with the director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and representatives from NGOs and the government engaged in promoting religious tolerance and combating anti-Semitism. The discussion focused on Holocaust education, integration, and religious freedom. A senior embassy official also met with her Israeli counterpart in September to discuss ways to counter anti-Semitism in the country.

The embassy and consulates worked closely with Jewish communities, especially in eastern Germany, to provide small grants in support of programs promoting religious tolerance to leading NGOs countering violent extremism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.

In May Embassy Berlin and Consulate Duesseldorf staff visited the Alevitische Gemeinde Deutschland e.V. (Alevi Community Germany) and the VIKZ Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (Association of Islamic Cultural Centers) to discuss issues of concern to those religious communities. They also met with the

managing director of the Jewish Synagogue Community Cologne and with a Muslim contact to discuss religious freedom.

In August staff from the embassy and the consulate in Duesseldorf met with the chief administrator of the Jewish Community in Duesseldorf and with staff of SABRA, a Duesseldorf-based NGO for antidiscrimination engagement and counseling against racism and anti-Semitism. The discussion focused on the experience of the Jewish community in Duesseldorf and on countering anti-Semitism.

In October officers from the consulate general in Frankfurt met with police and justice ministry officials from Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse, Saarland, and Baden-Wuerttemberg States on combating anti-Semitism. Many of the participants commended the event for offering a neutral space to discuss best practices and challenges and requested the consulate to host it on a regular basis.

In November embassy officials met with the imam of a mosque that included a prayer space not segregated by gender and open to LGBTI worshippers. They discussed possibilities for future cooperation and support.

The embassy sponsored a 10-day visitor program for a group of 16 youth leaders from the Berlin-based Kreuzberg Initiative Against Anti-Semitism to travel to Washington, D.C., Birmingham, and Dallas in February-March. The program focused on countering intolerance through the lens of effective anti-Semitism programs. The Ambassador attended the briefing and debriefing sessions at the embassy.

The embassy and consulates actively promoted religious freedom and tolerance through their social media channels, utilizing Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to highlight the engagement of the Ambassador and other senior embassy officials on this issue. For example, following the October attack on the synagogue in Halle, the embassy published a statement condemning it as an attack on religious freedom and tolerance on its social media accounts. The postings received high levels of engagement.