

# **FRANCE 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. The government regularly investigated and prosecuted crimes against religious groups, including anti-Semitic violence. There were a number of incidents and court cases relating to enforcement of laws prohibiting face coverings in public spaces and government buildings which predominantly affected Muslim women. The government also prosecuted hate speech and vandalism, both of which were primarily directed at the Jewish and Muslim communities. During the year the government offered asylum to refugees from Middle Eastern Christian communities. Government leaders publicly condemned anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts and continued efforts to promote interfaith understanding through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups.

There was a reported 101 percent increase in anti-Semitic acts during the year in comparison with 2013. These acts involved numerous cases of physical violence against the Jewish community where individuals were targeted and beaten and synagogues were fire bombed. The Jewish community reported an increase in the number of Jews emigrating to Israel, reaching 7,231 individuals, compared to 3,293 in 2013. There were also reports of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses and societal abuses or discrimination against members of the Muslim and Catholic communities. Representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities took steps to condemn intolerance and promote religious understanding and freedom.

The U.S. embassy continued to discuss religious freedom issues with the government, including the increase of anti-Semitic acts. The embassy promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups and engaged with civil society, religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the country. In September the Special Envoy against Anti-Semitism visited France and engaged government and community leaders to discuss anti-Semitism and racism. The Consuls General in Strasbourg and Marseille and American Presence Post officers in Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux, and Lyon participated in outreach to Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

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The U.S. government estimates the total population at 66.3 million (July 2014 estimate). The French government does not maintain official statistics on religious affiliation but government studies occasionally do provide estimates. According to the latest study by the National Institute for Demographic Studies conducted in 2008 and published in 2010, 45 percent of respondents aged 18-50 years claimed no religious affiliation, 43 percent identified as Catholic, 8 percent as Muslim, 2 percent as Protestant, and the remaining 2 percent of respondents identified as Orthodox Christian, Buddhists, Jewish, and others.

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

Daily newspaper *Le Parisien* estimates there are 1.2 million Protestants, 500,000 of whom are evangelical. Many evangelical churches are African-style “prosperity” churches composed primarily of African and Antillean immigrants. The Buddhist Union of France estimates there are one million Buddhists, mainly consisting of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000 and is comprised of approximately 60 percent Sephardic and 40 percent Ashkenazi Jews. Jehovah’s Witnesses estimate they have approximately 120,000 members. Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; most are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches. The Church of Scientology estimates it has 45,000 members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimates its membership at 36,000 in metropolitan France and 22,000 in overseas departments and territories. According to the Sikh community, there are 30,000 Sikhs in metropolitan France with the largest concentration in Parisian suburbs.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides that the state “shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law” regardless of their religion and shall respect all beliefs. A law passed in 1905 provides for the separation of church and state and guarantees the free exercise of religious worship except in the interest of maintaining the public order.

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The law, as well as international and European covenants which carry the force of law in the country, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with the freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of 1,500 euros (\$1,825) 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.

Although not required by law, religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and register to gain official recognition. The law defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to controls by the state to ensure fiscal responsibility. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in profit-making activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories. For example, Mormons perform religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school through their cultural association.

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

The law prohibits covering one's face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces such as restaurants and movie theaters. If the police encounter someone in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they are legally required to ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. Police officials may not

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remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. An individual, however, may not be questioned or held for more than four hours. Refusal to remove the face-covering garment after being instructed to do so by a police official carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$182) or attendance at a citizenship course.

Individuals who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority, are subject to a fine of 30,000 euros (\$36,500) and can receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the victim is a minor.

According to the law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. It also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

There are three French territories in which the 1905 law does not apply. Because Alsace-Lorraine was part of the German Empire during the passage of the 1905 law, members of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments may also provide financial support for building religious edifices. French Guyana, which is governed under the colonial laws of Charles X (1824-1830), may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. The French Overseas Departments and Territories, which include island territories in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and several sub-Antarctic islands as well as a claim in Antarctica, are also not subject to the 1905 law and may provide funding for religious groups within their territories.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Religious instruction is not provided in public schools, except in the territories of Alsace-Lorraine, French Guyana, and French Overseas Departments and Territories. Facts about religious groups, however, are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear religious symbols or to be given religious instruction in school may homeschool or send their children to a private school.

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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 teacher's salaries provided the school accepts all children regardless of an individual child's religious affiliation.

Anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. For violent crimes the penalties are increased when the offense is committed because of the victim's actual or perceived membership or non-membership in a given religious group. The government may expel non-citizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

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

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."

### **Government Practices**

The government regularly investigated and prosecuted crimes against religious groups, including anti-Semitic violence and anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate speech and vandalism. The government's ban against face coverings in public places was confirmed by various court rulings. Government leaders publicly condemned anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts and continued efforts to promote interfaith understanding through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups.

In February additional suspects were indicted as a result of an investigation of an Islamist cell connected to a 2012 attack on a kosher grocery store in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles, bringing the total number of those indicted to 14.

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On October 24, a Pontoise criminal court sentenced a man to four years in prison for burning down the same kosher grocery store, which was attacked in Sarcelles on July 20, when mobs chanting anti-Israel and anti-Semitic slogans burned down the grocery store and three other Jewish-owned businesses in Sarcelles.

The Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and to Combat Sectarian Abuses continued to observe and analyze the activities of minority religious groups that had been labeled as “sects.” It coordinated responses to abuses, violations of law and threats to public order, and provided assistance to victims.

An interministerial task force against racism and anti-Semitism, composed of senior civil servants, continued to implement the government’s action plan against racism and anti-Semitism for the period 2012-2014.

According to the Observatory for Secularism, an institute established in 2013 by President Hollande to advise the government on the implementation of the principle of secularism and composed of 15 senior civil servants, parliamentarians, legal experts, and intellectuals, from 2011, when the ban on covering one’s face in public went into effect, until February 21, police had reportedly stopped and questioned 1,111 individuals whose identities could not be determined because their faces were obscured by masks or clothing. Of those, 1,038 were convicted and fined and 61 individuals were given warnings. The government reiterated it had enacted the law prohibiting covering the face in public places to address security concerns.

On January 8, a court found a Muslim woman guilty of insulting and threatening three police officers in a 2013 incident when officers attempted to verify her identity while she was wearing a banned face-covering veil. There had been two days of riots protesting the incident in the Paris suburb of Trappes, and the woman’s husband had been arrested for reportedly attacking the police officer conducting the identity check. The woman received a one-month suspended sentence for her actions against the police officers and a 150 euro (\$182) fine for wearing a full-face covering veil. On July 1, the Versailles appellate court confirmed the husband’s 2013 conviction and his three-month suspended prison sentence and a 1,000 euro (\$1,217) fine.

On June 25, the full plenary session of the Court of Cassation ruled the 2008 firing of a Muslim woman for wearing a headscarf at work in a private child care center in a Paris suburb had been legal. Confirming the previous ruling of the Paris

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appellate court, the court said a private entity could place limits on its employees' freedom to express their religious beliefs in the workplace. The plaintiff announced her intention to appeal the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

In a July 1 ruling, the ECHR validated the 2010 law forbidding the full face-covering veil in public spaces. The judges rejected the request of a young French Muslim woman who said the ban violated her rights to freedom of religion, expression, and assembly. According to the judgment, the law did not exceed the margin of interpretation granted to states in implementing the European Convention on Human Rights. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated it welcomed the ECHR's ruling, saying the law at issue did not constitute an infringement of religious freedom or discrimination.

Members of the Sikh community continued to express concern about the law prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing religious symbols, including Sikh turbans, and asked the government to exempt them from this law.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 29 cases of authorities interfering with the community's proselytizing during the year. On February 22, the mayor of the Bajus commune threatened to issue a municipal order prohibiting door-to-door proselytizing if the Jehovah's Witnesses community did not stop these activities on their own.

On July 22, a Lyon court annulled a 2013 ruling ordering the Saint-Quentin-Fallavier prison to provide halal meals for Muslim prisoners. The Court ruled "given the possibility for detainees to get meals without pork or vegetarian meals, to get special meals during the main holidays, and given the possibility to buy halal meat," prisoner rights were already being respected.

According to the government, the number of prison chaplains had increased since 2008 and efforts were made to improve access to food appropriate for prisoners with religious dietary restrictions, specifically by providing vegetarian and non-pork meal options. Religious occasions, such as Ramadan, were observed in prisons. According to the Ministry of Justice, the penitentiary system employed 668 Catholic, 339 Protestant, 185 Muslim, 75 Jewish, 30 Orthodox, and 35 "other" chaplains. In the general detainee visiting area, any visitor could bring objects of worship to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues, but could not pray. Prisoners could pray individually in their cells, with the chaplain in the

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designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments in which they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

On January 13, the manager of the penitentiary administration notified the authorities who issued chaplain certifications to begin granting these certifications to Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 100 Jehovah's Witnesses were certified to officiate as chaplains in 190 prisons. In 2013 the Council of State, the highest administrative court, ruled it illegal for penitentiary authorities to refuse to permit Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains in prisons. Penitentiary authorities had denied the chaplains access to prisons on the grounds that the number of observant detainees was not sufficient to warrant their presence.

On May 15, the Observatory for Secularism released its first annual report evaluating secularism in schools, public spaces, and hospitals. The report recommended that the charter for secularism, developed in 2013 by National Education Minister Vincent Peillon for public schools to outline the main principles of the law separating church and state, also be posted in private schools receiving government funds.

According to Ministry of Education, for the 2012-2013 school year, the last year for which data was available, nearly 16 percent of schools were private and 13.4 percent of primary school students (898,000) were enrolled in private institutions. Of the private schools, 97 percent were Catholic; the remaining private schools were Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, or not religiously affiliated. There were two million primary and secondary school students attending 8,970 Catholic schools, and 30,500 Jewish students attending approximately 300 Jewish schools. There were also small numbers of students attending Protestant and Muslim schools.

Public schools made an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor nationwide courses and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. It partnered with the NGO League against Racism and Anti-Semitism to educate students about anti-Semitism and racism.

The Ministry of Interior continued to provide funding for an education program in Lyon, Paris, Strasbourg, and Aix-en-Provence, in collaboration with Catholic universities and local mosques, to provide students, including future clergy

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members, with a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms on secularism. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum. The training was open to high level officials and clergy from all religious groups, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations. Muslims expressed the greatest interest in the program, which also addressed the fact that most imams came from abroad and did not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations. The goal of this portion of the program was to develop an “Islam within France” and foster integration. The students were primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa.

On May 14, a trial court in Nice removed the 8-year-old daughter of a Jehovah’s Witness woman from her mother’s full custody, setting joint custody with the child’s father, and forbade the mother from practicing her religion with the child. The judge transferred the file to the court’s public prosecutor because the mother’s religious affiliation “leads to sectarian deviations likely to have consequences on the child’s education.”

The Simon Wiesenthal Center sent a request to the Minister of the Interior asking the government to rename a small village named La Mort aux Juifs (Death to Jews). The Interior Ministry requested the municipal council of Courtemaux change the village’s name, and the council approved a name change in December.

On January 21, the public prosecutor of Paris announced the establishment of training in coordination with the Holocaust Memorial for perpetrators of anti-Semitic, racist, or xenophobic acts. Courts could require individuals who pled guilty or were found guilty of committing racially and religiously motivated crimes, including hate speech, to attend the two-day training.

On January 9, President Hollande used his annual New Year’s meeting with top French religious figures to condemn anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts and to renew his government’s opposition to intolerance.

President Hollande and other government ministers condemned anti-Semitism and stated support for Holocaust education on numerous occasions, including: the March 4 annual dinner hosted by the largest Jewish umbrella organization, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF); the March 19 commemoration of the second anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 27 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration; the June 1 French Judaism Day observance;

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and the July 21 anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv roundup of Jews during World War II.

At the March 4 dinner President Hollande acknowledged anti-Semitism was a reality in France and said he had asked his administration to propose measures to increase the government's reactivity and resources for responding to the digital spread of racist and anti-Semitic messages. At the March 19 commemoration Prime Minister Ayrault expressed the government's commitment to fight against racist and anti-Semitic acts. At the July 21 Vel d'Hiv commemoration, Prime Minister Manuel Valls denounced "a new form of anti-Semitism" spreading "on the internet, on networks, in working class areas among young people who are often aimless, who have no awareness of history, who hide their hatred of the Jews behind the facade of anti-Zionism and behind hatred of the Israeli State."

On July 22, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius issued a joint statement with the German and Italian Foreign Ministers declaring anti-Semitism "cannot be tolerated in our societies in Europe. We strongly condemn the outrageous anti-Semitic statements, demonstrations, and attacks in our countries in recent days... Nothing, including the dramatic military confrontation in Gaza, justifies any such transgressions in Europe. We will do the utmost – jointly and in our countries – to make sure that all our fellow citizens can continue to live in peace and security."

On numerous occasions, President Hollande and senior government officials, including the prime minister, met with leaders from the Muslim community, including Dalil Boubakeur, President of the French Council of Muslim Faith (CFCM). They strongly denounced anti-Muslim acts and stressed the government's commitment to fight against acts of hatred directed against Muslims.

On January 17, Minister-Delegate for Urban Affairs Francois Lamy met with the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) to discuss anti-Muslim acts and secularism. The CCIF praised the meeting, which was the first of its kind between a government official and the collective.

On February 18, speaking at Paris' Grand Mosque ahead of the commemorations for the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I and the 70th anniversary of D-Day, President Hollande honored 100,000 Muslims who died fighting for France in both world wars. "France will never forget the price of the blood shed," he said, emphasizing Islam was "perfectly compatible with the values of France."

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On July 25, Prime Minister Valls attended an iftar in the mosque of Evry-Courcouronnes. He deplored anti-Muslim acts, saying “Today, too many words, too many acts are targeting France’s Muslims.”

In a July 28 joint statement, Foreign Minister Fabius and Interior Minister Cazeneuve condemned the widespread acts of violence against Christian communities in Iraq and Syria and pledged the government would offer asylum to those seeking refuge from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). As of September more than 500 Iraqi Christians had sought refuge in the country.

On January 6, then Interior Minister Valls sent a memo to local prefects, the most senior representatives of the central government at the local level, urging them to remind mayors of their right to ban performances by controversial performer Dieudonne, who had been fined seven times for inciting discrimination, hatred, and violence against Jews. The memo stated the fight against racism and anti-Semitism was a top government priority and mayors could prohibit performances by Dieudonne for threatening public order.

In a January 9 ruling, the Council of State overturned a decision earlier the same day in which a Nantes court had granted permission to Dieudonne to perform in the city. In its ruling, the Council of State cited “the risk to public order” and “offense to dignity” to justify the ban. On February 12, a Paris Court ordered Dieudonne to remove two sections of a video he had posted online on the grounds the passages violated laws against Holocaust denial and incitement to racial hatred.

On June 20, a court in Paris dismissed a hate speech lawsuit filed by the Union of French Jewish Students (UEJF) against Dieudonne after he posted a video online in April. In the video he called for “the non-Jews to revolt and mobilize against occupation and servitude imposed by French Jews.” The UEJF appealed the ruling.

On February 25, a Lons-le-Saunier criminal court sentenced a 23-year-old man to a six month suspended jail sentence and a 800 euro (\$973) fine for praising terrorism and inciting racial hatred in a video posted online, where he presented himself as the “new Mohammed Merah” (a terrorist who carried out several shootings, including at a Jewish school) and used anti-Semitic language.

Hassan Diab was extradited from Canada on November 14, after a six-year legal battle. On November 15, authorities indicted and charged him with murder,

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attempted murder, and destruction of property using an explosive device as part of an organized group. Diab was the prime suspect in a 1980 terrorist attack on a Paris synagogue that killed four people and wounded 40 others. He was placed in provisional detention, under which an accused person is detained until trial.

On April 8, the Arras criminal court postponed until December the trial of two men accused of the 2013 desecration of the graves of Muslim soldiers in the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette military cemetery. The two men were accused of having vandalized 148 Muslim tombs with swastikas and anti-Muslim graffiti. No further information on the case was available at year's end.

On September 17, the Mamoudzou criminal court on the island of Mayotte sentenced two women to nine months confinement, with six months suspended, and a gendarme to a six-month suspended prison sentence for inciting religious hatred after they placed a pig's head outside a mosque in Mayotte on New Year's Eve. The three were also ordered to pay compensation of 25,000 euros (\$30,400) to the mosque's association. The minister for overseas territories and departments and the local prefect condemned the act of desecration.

On January 13, the Paris appellate court formally charged three branches and three leaders of the Church of Scientology with fraud, deceptive commercial practices, and abuse of public funds, following accusations that a private school based in Vincennes taught Scientology precepts to approximately 50 children without the knowledge of their parents in 1998. No trial date had been set at year's end.

In July the Versailles prosecutor office opened a preliminary investigation of the Church of Scientology following reports of harassment of 12 employees of a company whose owner had joined the church. Plaintiffs said they were forced to undergo a training routine which amounted to psychological harassment. The investigation continued at year's end.

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

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

Jewish organizations reported a 101 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents from 2013, including physical assaults and fire bombings. The number of Jews emigrating from France was more than double the 2013 total. Anti-Muslim acts

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declined and were mainly directed at women wearing veils and headscarves. Other acts affecting both Jews and Muslims included hate speech, vandalism, and desecration of religious property. Threats and violence were also reported against the Catholic and Jehovah's Witness communities. Representatives from the Jewish and Muslim communities, the Protestant Federation, and the Catholic Conference of Bishops took steps to condemn intolerance and promote interfaith dialogue. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On March 20, three unidentified men beat a Jewish teacher, shouted anti-Semitic epithets at him and drew a swastika on his chest after he left a kosher restaurant in Paris.

On April 4, a man attacked two Jehovah's Witnesses in Santec, Brittany, while they were proselytizing. The man beat one of the Jehovah's Witnesses, brandished a bat at them, and followed and attempted to run the two men over with his car.

On May 24, two assailants physically assaulted two young Jewish men after they left a synagogue in Creteil, a Paris suburb. The perpetrators fled the scene and remained at large. Authorities opened an investigation into the attack, the outcome of which was pending at year's end.

On June 23, a group of 20 assailants surrounded and beat a group of Jewish students inside a local library in Paris. The students were wearing skullcaps. The assailants also stabbed two of the students when they fled, and police arrested several of the attackers.

On July 8, a man pepper-sprayed a 17-year-old Jewish female on the street in Paris. The victim reported to police the man grabbed her jaw and sprayed her in the face while shouting anti-Semitic remarks.

On July 11, demonstrators protesting Israeli airstrikes in Gaza threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in the Aulnay-sous-Bois suburb of Paris. The Molotov cocktail went off in the entrance of the synagogue; no one was injured and the fire caused minimal damage.

On July 13, a group of pro-Palestinian protesters clashed with riot police and Jewish youths outside Paris' Synagogue de la Roquette during a service at the synagogue, yelling pro-Islamic and anti-Semitic slogans and trapping worshippers

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inside. The police intervened to restore order and kept worshippers inside for two hours until the demonstrators dispersed.

On July 20, a protest against Israeli airstrikes in Gaza turned into a riot. Demonstrators threw projectiles at a synagogue in Garges-Les-Gonesse, but did not cause damage.

On December 1, armed assailants forcibly entered the apartment of a Jewish couple in the Paris suburb of Creteil. They tied up the young couple, demanded money, and raped the woman. Police arrested two suspects the same day and charged them with religiously motivated violence, armed robbery, rape, kidnapping, and extortion. Authorities later charged a third suspect as an accomplice and arrested a fourth suspect in late December on similar charges to the first two suspects. The male victim said the assailants talked about attacking Jews. The day after the attack, the prime minister posted a statement on a social media site saying the attack showed “the fight against anti-Semitism is a daily fight.”

The Jewish Community Protection Service reported a 101 percent increase in anti-Semitic acts during the year in comparison to the same period in 2013, with 851 incidents recorded.

The National Observatory Against Islamophobia, part of the CFCM, registered a 41 percent decrease in acts against Muslims during the year, based on the number of lawsuits filed by victims, compared with 2013. The annual report of the National Observatory reported that 133 anti-Muslim acts (55 actions and 78 threats) were recorded by law enforcement during the year. The highest concentration of incidents was in Paris’ Ile-de-France region. Abdallah Zekri, the observatory’s president, stated these statistics did not take into account that “many Muslims do not want to file a complaint after they have been subjected to Islamophobic acts.” The CCIF registered 691 anti-Muslim acts in 2013, the last year for which its data was available.

The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) annual report for 2013, the last year for which data was available, noted a decrease in anti-Semitic and an increase in anti-Muslim attacks. These incidents included physical assaults; verbal harassment; vandalism, including desecration of places of worship; internet and media hate speech; and vandalism, including desecration of places of worship.

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Officials of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported 29 cases where members were physically attacked during the year, representing a 34 percent decrease in violent acts compared to 2013.

According to statistics released by the Jewish Agency, 7,231 people left France to live in Israel during the year compared to 3,293 people in 2013. At least one leader in the Jewish community linked the increase in emigration to the rise in violent acts against Jews.

The CNCDH annual report included the results of a poll conducted by the BVA Institute, involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of over 1,000 residents over the age of 18, showing 94 percent of the respondents said wearing a burqa created problems living in society, while 80 percent believed the same with respect to the hijab.

On September 16, a Pantheon-Sorbonne University teacher asked a female Muslim student to remove her veil during class. When the student refused, the teacher suggested she transfer to another class. The student sent a letter of protest to the university's president who officially apologized on behalf of the university and deplored the incident as an incorrect interpretation of the law which prohibited public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols.

On October 3, Opera Bastille employees told a woman wearing a niqab and sitting in the front row to leave the second act of a performance if she did not remove her veil. Cast members had refused to continue to perform if she remained in the audience. The media reported the woman was "a tourist from a Gulf state."

On May 19, the UEJF reported the return on a social media site of the hashtag #unbonjuif ("a good Jew"), created by a user in 2012. UEJF said the hashtag was used in 2,039 posts on the website on May 14-15, and these usages included messages protesting the use of anti-Semitic hash tags. In 2013 the social media site announced it had provided authorities with the names of those responsible for posting anti-Semitic messages using the hashtag. The UEJF filed a lawsuit in 2013 following the release of these names, the status of which was not known at the end of the year.

On February 11, worshippers discovered a pig's head, other pieces of a pig's carcass, and hostile graffiti on the grounds of the mosque in Blois. Then Interior

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Minister Valls issued a statement condemning the attack and expressing his support for the Muslim community. Authorities opened an investigation into the attack, the outcome of which was pending at year's end.

On April 18, a mosque in Mantes-la-Ville announced it had filed a criminal complaint with police for an incident “provoking racial hatred or religious discrimination” after a dozen slices of pork pate and a threatening letter were stuffed into its letterbox. The investigation was ongoing at year's end.

Between January and December 2013, the last year for which data was available, the Ministry of Interior reported 405 Catholic churches and chapels were vandalized and 197 cemeteries were desecrated, representing a 10.7 percent increase in anti-Catholic incidents compared with 2012.

On January 4 according to witnesses, a man entered the Saint-Odile Catholic church in Paris and broke candles, statues, and other religious items. Police arrested a 29-year-old homeless man of Romanian origin. On January 8, then Interior Minister Manuel Valls issued a statement condemning the desecration and expressing his support to Catholics.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 77 acts of vandalism on places of worship during the year. These cases included the March 13 arson of a Kingdom Hall in Gastes in which the hall was completely destroyed. Authorities closed the criminal case because they could not identify a perpetrator.

On February 3, the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association brought together leaders from the Jewish and Muslim communities to sign a “fraternity pact.” Religious leaders promised to continue the fight against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim discrimination in France.

On September 9, Muslim leaders, including heads and rectors from the most influential mosques around the country, signed a joint document expressing their support for endangered Christians in the Middle East. They called for a national day of prayer in support of Christians in the Middle East and urged imams in the country to use their influence to discourage young people from joining ISIL.

On March 19, the interfaith community held events in Toulouse and Montauban to commemorate the victims of seven murders committed by Mohammed Merah in 2012.

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In an annual event, a series of interfaith dialogues took place between Jewish and Muslim communities across the country between November 14 and 16. Jews and Muslims, along with government and community leaders, gathered in 30 different places of worship to discuss belief systems, recent government actions, and religious activities in an effort to facilitate communication and understanding between the two groups.

The Council of Christian Churches, composed of three, seven-member delegations representing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches, continued to serve as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. A three-member delegation represented the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represented the Anglican Communion on the council.

The Roman Catholic Bishops Conference's National Service for Relations with Islam, an organization for interfaith engagement with Muslims, hosted an annual training session on Islam in July to maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations.

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

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters to discuss religious tolerance and the increase in anti-Semitic actions during the year. Embassy officers also met regularly with private citizens, religious groups, and NGOs engaged on religious freedom issues. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim acts, and interfaith dialogue with senior representatives from major religious groups and hosted meetings with the CRIF, CFCM, and Catholic priests working on interfaith dialogue.

The embassy met with Muslim community leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and concerns over radicalization and to advocate U.S. policies, including tolerance for diversity. Embassy officers met with interfaith leaders regularly to address issues facing both the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Department of State representatives visited to conduct outreach activities, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, who met with

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religious, community, and government leaders to discuss anti-Semitism and racism in France.

The embassy actively promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups, including between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Staff from the consulates general and the American presence posts (APPs) met with members of the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities in Strasbourg, Marseille, Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux, and Lyon.

The embassy supported NGO projects furthering the values of tolerance and coexistence, including a program to provide skills and tools to combat anti-Muslim sentiment and a program to enable young people from diverse religious backgrounds to explore issues of religious tolerance and other forms of tolerance with U.S. counterparts.

On September 30, APP representatives in Lyon participated in the 20th anniversary celebration of the Grand Mosque and attended an iftar discussing issues of concern to Lyon's Muslim community.

APP Toulouse staff met regularly with Muslim and Jewish religious leaders, particularly following acts of anti-Semitic vandalism during demonstrations protesting Israeli airstrikes in Gaza from May to July. Embassy representatives visited the Toulouse Grand Mosque and other Muslim prayer rooms and engaged Muslims on their views of religious tolerance, discrimination, and interfaith relations in France. APP staff also met regularly with representatives from the Jewish community in Toulouse, soliciting their views on security, intentions to emigrate, and efforts to promote interfaith dialogue.

In August the embassy sponsored the travel of a government official working on social welfare programs to the United States to meet with associations promoting religious tolerance.

APP Bordeaux organized several visits with community religious leaders, including meetings to plan events with local interfaith leaders from the Jewish and Muslim communities.

In December APP Rennes staff met with the Jewish Cultural Center in Rennes to discuss secularism, anti-Semitism, and racism in the regions of western France.