

SWITZERLAND 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of faith and conscience, and it and the penal code prohibit discrimination against any religion or religious adherents. The constitution delegates regulation of the relationship between government and religious groups to the 26 cantons. The canton of Ticino's ban on face coverings in public places entered into force on July 1. On the same day police in the canton detained a woman for wearing a *niqab* and a man for protesting the ban. Two localities established Islamic gravesites or authorized their separate allocation in municipal cemeteries. A court upheld a decision to deny permission to establish a private Islamic nursery school in Zurich. The city of Basel denied citizenship to two Muslim girls because of their refusal to participate in swimming classes for religious reasons. The high school council in Basel-Land Canton rejected a complaint by the family of two Muslim brothers whom a school penalized for refusing to shake their female teacher's hand for religious reasons, and the city of Basel suspended the family's citizenship application. A court in St. Gallen Canton fined a Muslim man for forbidding his daughters, for religious reasons, from participating in swimming lessons at school. The Swiss Federal Council stated it would ban neither local mosques nor imams from accepting foreign financing.

Islamic organizations reported an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, which they attributed to the rise of ISIS and terror attacks in Brussels and Nice. Media surveys also exposed growing social unease towards Islam. According to the Coordinated Islamic Organizations of Switzerland (KIOS), one of the principal Muslim groups in the country, Muslim women wearing headscarves felt increasingly isolated and excluded from society, non-Muslim children shunned Muslim classmates in school, and Muslims frequently felt discrimination when seeking employment. A court ruled a private company's 2015 dismissal of a Muslim woman for wearing a headscarf to work was illegal. A Sikh representative said Sikh children who did not cut their hair for religious reasons had trouble being accepted at school or in vocational traineeships, and that Sikh youth experienced difficulties finding apprenticeships. Jewish groups reported fewer anti-Semitic statements and acts in 2015, but said the number of incidents remained high.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government, focusing on access to religious education and religious services. The Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials to discuss Nazi-looted art and the country's 2017 chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance

Alliance. Embassy officials met with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society officials, and religious leaders from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities as well as representatives of other religious minorities, eliciting their views on the extent of religious discrimination. The embassy hosted an interfaith Passover dinner, an iftar, and an interfaith Rosh Hashanah dinner, all of which included discussions on religious tolerance and religious diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.2 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Federal Statistics Office, as of 2014, the latest year for which figures are available, 38 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 26.2 percent Reformed Evangelical, 5.7 percent other Christian groups, 5 percent Muslim, and 0.2 percent Jewish. Among the other Christian groups, 2.2 percent of the population is Orthodox Christian or Old-Oriental Christian, 2.2 percent belongs to other Protestant groups, including evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatic Christians; the remaining 1.3 percent includes Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Christian Catholics (also known as Old Catholics). Religious groups together constituting 1.3 percent of the population include Buddhists, Hindus, Bahais, and Sikhs. Persons identifying with no religious group constitute 22.2 percent, and the religious affiliation of 1.3 percent of the population is unknown.

Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are of foreign origin, with over 30 countries represented. Media reports state most come from countries of the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many Muslims also come from Albania, Turkey, North Africa, and Somalia. According to the 2014 *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, 80 percent of the Muslim community is Sunni; the minority includes 9.5 percent Shia, 7 percent Alevi, and 3.5 percent Ahmadis and others. More than 50 percent of the Muslim population lives in the cities of Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, Bern, Aarau, and St. Gallen; the highest Muslim population density is in the cantons Basel City, Glarus, St. Gallen, Thurgau, and Schaffhausen. More than 75 percent of Jewish households are located in Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Bern.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Framework

In its preamble, the constitution states it is adopted in the name of “Almighty God.” It guarantees freedom of faith and conscience, states each person has the right to choose his or her religion, and prohibits religious discrimination. It states the confederation and cantons may, within the scope of their powers, act to preserve peace between members of different religious communities. The federal penal code prohibits any form of “debasement,” which is not specifically defined, or discrimination against any religion or religious adherents.

Inciting hatred or discrimination, including by electronic means and on the basis of religion, is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment or a fine. The law also penalizes anyone who refuses to provide a service because of someone’s religion, organizes, promotes, or participates in propaganda aimed at degrading and defaming adherents of a religion, or “denies, justifies, or plays down genocide or other crimes against humanity.”

The constitution delegates regulation of relations between the government and religious groups to the 26 cantons, including the issuance of licenses and property permits. The cantons offer legal recognition as public entities to religious communities that fulfill a number of prerequisites and whose applications for recognition are approved in a popular referendum. The necessary prerequisites include a statement acknowledging the right of religious freedom; the democratic organization of the religious community; respect for the cantonal and federal constitutions and rule of law; and financial transparency.

The cantons of Basel, Zurich, and Vaud also offer religious communities legal recognition as private entities. This gives them the right to teach their religions in public schools. Procedures for obtaining private legal recognition vary; for example, in Basel the approval of the canton’s Grand Council is required.

There is no law requiring the registration of a religious group in the cantonal commercial registry. New regulations, which entered into force on January 1, require religious foundations, characterized as institutions with a religious purpose that receive financial donations and maintain connections to a religious community, to be registered in the commercial registry. To register as a religious foundation in the commercial registry, the foundation must submit an official letter of application to the respective authorities and include the organization’s name, purpose, board members, and head office location as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization’s statutes. The granting of tax-exempt status to a religious group varies from canton to canton. Most cantons automatically grant tax-exempt status

to those religious communities that receive cantonal financial support, while all other religious communities must generally establish they are organized as non-profit associations and submit an application for tax-exempt status to the cantonal government.

All of the cantons, with the exception of Geneva, Neuchatel, Ticino, and Vaud, financially support at least one of four religious communities that the cantons have recognized as public entities – Roman Catholic, Christian Catholic, Reformed Evangelical, or Jewish – with funds collected through a mandatory church tax for registered church members and, in some cantons, businesses. Only religious groups recognized as public entities are eligible to receive funds collected through the church tax, and no canton has recognized any other religious groups as public entities. The church tax is voluntary in the cantons of Ticino, Neuchatel, and Geneva, while in all others an individual who chooses not to pay the church tax may have to leave the religious institution formally. The canton of Vaud is the only canton that does not collect a church tax; however, the Reformed Evangelical and Roman Catholic denominations are subsidized directly through the cantonal budget.

The construction of minarets is banned in accord with a national referendum. The ban does not apply to the four existing mosques with minarets. New mosques may be built without minarets.

The constitution sets education policy at the cantonal level, but municipal school authorities have some discretion in implementing cantonal guidelines. Most public cantonal schools offer religious education, with the exception of schools in Geneva and Neuchatel. Public schools normally offer classes in Catholic and/or Protestant doctrines with the precise details varying from canton to canton and sometimes from school to school; a few schools provide instruction on other religions. The municipality of Ebikon in the Canton of Lucerne offers religious classes in Islamic doctrine, as does the municipality of Kreuzlingen in the Canton of Thurgau. In some cantons, religious classes are voluntary, while in others, such as in Zurich and Fribourg, they form part of the mandatory curriculum at the secondary school level; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Children from minority religious groups may attend classes for their own faith during the religious class period; these classes must be organized and financed by the minority religious groups and are held outside of the public schools. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools at their expense or homeschool their children.

Most cantons complement traditional classes in Christian doctrines with more general classes about religion and culture. There are no national guidelines for waivers on religious grounds from classes other than religious instruction, and practices vary.

A federal animal welfare law prevents ritual slaughter of animals without prior anesthetization. The ban applies to kosher and halal slaughter practices. Importation of traditionally slaughtered kosher and halal meat is legal and such products are available.

Religious groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize, but foreign missionaries from countries not members of the European Union or the European Free Trade Association must obtain a religious worker visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof the foreigner does not displace a citizen from a job; that he/she has completed formal theological training; and that he/she will be financially supported by the host organization. Non-recognized religious groups must also demonstrate to cantonal governments that the number of its foreign religious workers is not out of proportion to the size of the community when compared to the relative number of religious workers of cantonally-recognized religious communities.

Foreign missionaries must also have sufficient knowledge of, respect for, and understanding of national customs and culture; be conversant in at least one of the three main national languages; and hold a degree in theology. The law requires immigrant clerics with insufficient language skills and knowledge of local culture and customs, regardless of religious affiliation, to attend mandatory language courses as well as related specialist training to facilitate their integration into society.

In some instances, the cantons may approve an applicant lacking this proficiency by devising an “integration agreement” that contains certain goals the applicant must try to meet. The host organization must also “recognize the country’s legal norms” and pledge it will not tolerate abuse of the law by its members. If an applicant is unable to meet these requirements, the government may deny the residency and work permits.

The law also allows the government to refuse residency and work permits if a background check reveals an individual has ties to religious groups deemed “radicalized” or has engaged in “hate preaching,” defined as publicly inciting hatred against a religious group, disseminating ideologies intended to defame

members of a religious group, organizing defamatory propaganda campaigns, public discrimination, denying or trivializing genocide and other crimes against humanity, or refusing to provide service based on religion. The law authorizes immigration authorities to refuse residency permits to clerics considered “fundamentalists” by the government if the authorities deem internal security or public order is at risk.

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

Government Practices

The canton of Ticino’s ban on facial coverings in public places entered into force on July 1, and on the same day authorities detained a woman for violating the ban and a man for protesting it. A municipality in Lausanne established 250 Muslim gravesites, and a city in St. Gallen Canton revised its regulations to allow the separate allocation of Islamic gravesites in municipal burial grounds. The country’s highest court upheld a decision to deny a permit for a private Islamic nursery school in Zurich. Basel denied citizenship to two Muslim schoolgirls because they refused to take part in required swimming classes, and a court in St. Gallen Canton fined a father for forbidding his Muslim daughters from taking mandatory swimming classes. The city of Basel suspended a Muslim family’s citizenship application after two members of the family, students at a high school, refused to shake a teacher’s hand for religious reasons. The school punished the students and rejected an appeal of the decision by the family. A regional court in Bern Canton ruled a private company’s dismissal of a Muslim woman for wearing a headscarf to work was illegal.

According to local media reports, the Department of Defense and Civil Protection founded a working group for devising adequate protection measures for Jewish institutions, due to the concerns of Jewish communities about an increased terror threat against Jews. On November 1, the Ministry of Interior’s Service for the Fight against Racism issued a report titled “Measures taken by the federal state to combat anti-Semitism in Switzerland.” According to the report, while the state was required to protect Jews if they were at risk of attacks, it had no responsibility to provide security for Jewish institutions. The report suggested Jewish organizations could create a foundation to finance the costs of providing security to Jewish institutions. Herbert Winter, the president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG), wrote in a statement, “This type of proposal is unacceptable to us,” because protection “is the state’s duty.”

On July 1, the canton of Ticino's ban on burqas, *niqabs*, and other face coverings in public, approved in a 2013 referendum and approved by parliament in 2015, entered into force. The law banned facial coverings for religious reasons, or facial coverings aimed at maintaining anonymity while perpetrating violent acts in public places, including in shops, restaurants, or public buildings. Penalties for violations entailed fines of up to 10,000 Swiss francs (\$9,812). On July 1, police in Locarno, Ticino Canton, detained a Swiss Muslim woman for wearing a *niqab* and a French-Algerian man accompanying her for inciting violation of the ban. According to press reports, the man was immediately fined 230 Swiss francs (\$226), including court costs, and was potentially subject to additional fines. The woman had not been fined by year's end.

In June voters of the city of Adliswil in the canton of Zurich approved revisions to the city's personnel regulations that allow the cantonal government to ban public officials, in the context of enforcing neutral behavior, from wearing or expressing political, ideological, or religious views and symbols, including headscarves and crucifixes, at work.

According to unconfirmed reports from an individual working at an NGO involved with interreligious dialogue and migrant integration, authorities in Basel, Lucerne, and Bern denied recognition applications by Hindu communities on the grounds that the Hindu community had not been established in the country for a sufficiently long time. Authorities reportedly told the Bosnian communities in Basel and Aargau they should not submit an application as they would stand no chance of winning approval in a popular vote. In Lucerne, authorities reportedly told the Muslim community they were not processing recognition applications.

The city of Wil in the canton of St. Gallen revised its cemetery and burial regulations to allow the separate allocation of Islamic gravesites in municipal burial grounds. In February the canton of Bern called on municipalities to designate a special section in their cemeteries as Islamic burial grounds. In April the municipality of Bois-de-Vaux in Lausanne established 250 Muslim gravesites at its cemetery. Muslim representatives continued to report to local media the need for more Islamic burial grounds in municipalities to reduce the financial costs of expatriating deceased family members to their country of origin. The representatives added that second-generation migrant Muslims increasingly wanted to be buried in the country.

In November the Federal Court, the country's highest court, dismissed the al Huda Islamic Association's complaint regarding the Zurich educational authority's 2015

rejection of the association's application to establish a private Islamic nursery school to educate children in Arabic and on the Quran. The Federal Court ruled the intended school's operational concept failed to comply with the legal requirements of a religiously-oriented private school. According to the Federal Court, al Huda's concept lacked the separation of religious and secular content and overemphasized the association's viewpoint of religion forming the basis of all acquired knowledge, thereby exceeding the extent to which a faith-based school was allowed to give weight to religion in its teachings.

In March SIG stated increasing exemption requests by Muslims resulted in public schools granting fewer allowances regarding religious attire and dispensations from classes for religious reasons. SIG added stricter school policies not only constrained Muslim students' religious practices, but also had the potential to increasingly restrict Jewish students' religious expressions, such as wearing the Jewish skullcap (kippah).

In June the city of Basel denied Swiss citizenship to two Muslim sisters aged 12 and 14 years, due to the girls' refusal to participate in mandatory school swimming classes and school camps for religious reasons. Basel's naturalization committee based its decision on a 2013 Federal Court ruling that declared school swimming lessons part of compulsory education. The committee said citizenship applicants must fulfill all the requirements of compulsory education to qualify for naturalization. There was no legal mechanism for appealing the decision.

In June the district court of Rheintal in St. Gallen Canton sentenced a Muslim father to a suspended fine of 3,000 Swiss francs (\$2,944) and an additional, unsuspended fine of 1,000 Swiss francs (\$981) for neglecting his welfare and educational duties towards his children, as well as for breaching the cantonal education law and failing to respect official orders after he forbade his daughters, for religious reasons, from participating in compulsory school swimming lessons and a school camp. The judge stated the man's behavior was hindering the integration of his children.

In April Basel's migration office suspended the citizenship application of a Muslim family, according to media reports. The suspension followed a refusal, for religious reasons, by two brothers, aged 14 and 16, who were members of the family and students at a high school in Therwil, Basel-Land Canton, to shake a teacher's hand in October 2015. The brothers said their behavior was intended to "protect a woman's dignity." The school penalized the brothers with community service duties. In September the high school council in Therwil rejected the

family's complaint about the punishment. The high school had initially granted the brothers an exemption from shaking hands with their teacher, but following a legal assessment by the cantonal education authorities, the school reversed its decision and obligated the brothers to greet their teacher by shaking hands. The family's appeal against the school's community service penalty imposed on their sons remained pending with the cantonal government. The case generated widespread local and international media attention.

Reportedly in reaction to this incident, the Basel education directorate informed schools in the Basel region they could fine parents up to 5,000 Swiss francs (\$4,907) if their children repeatedly refused to adhere to a school's code of conduct, which may include an obligation to shake hands with teachers. In June members of the Jewish community spoke out against the ruling.

In March Freiburg Canton declared a proposed referendum by the anti-immigration Swiss People's Party (SVP), which collected signatures for a cantonal vote against the establishment of an Islamic Center in the University of Fribourg, was invalid. The cantonal parliament said the referendum would have violated the federal constitution's prohibition against religious discrimination.

In April the city of Bern rejected the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland's (ICCS) application for hosting a public event aimed at promoting peace and the denunciation of ISIS after police authorities said they could not guarantee the safety of the demonstrators because of the "international political situation of recent months."

On June 30, the Federal Council, the federal government's cabinet, stated it would ban neither local mosques nor imams from accepting foreign financing nor require imams to hold sermons in one of the country's national languages. The government's statement came after a parliamentary motion was submitted by a lower house of parliament representative, who raised concerns over foreign funds potentially propagating radical Islam. The Federal Council said any ban on foreign financial flows for Islamic institutions would discriminate against the Muslim community, and that existing laws were sufficient to mitigate the risks of radical preachers.

In July the public prosecutor's office of Valais Canton initiated criminal proceedings against a lower house parliamentarian from the SVP for violating the antiracism law after the man publicly condoned the killing of a Muslim man by

another Muslim in a St. Gallen mosque in 2015 with a tweet that read “We want more!” The case was pending at year’s end.

In January the Young Socialists Switzerland (JUSO), the youth branch of the Social Democratic Party, posted an anti-Semitic cartoon on its Facebook page depicting President Johann Schneider-Ammann feeding a Jewish man, while declining to feed the child next to him, and saying “... and a spoon for... the international financial lobby.” JUSO removed the cartoon and published an apology, stating it had not had any anti-Semitic intentions.

The government granted visas primarily to religious workers who intended to replace individuals serving in similar functions in the same religious community. Applicants were required to prove they had sufficient financial means to support their stay in the country during their assignment. Although there was no fixed number of residence permits allocated to Turkish imams, Turkish nationals applying for short- and long-term religious worker visas needed to show they were associated with the Turkish Central Authority for Religious Affairs. In 2015, the latest year for which figures were available, the government granted residence permits to 19 imams, 17 of whom were from Turkey and two from Macedonia.

According to the courts, missionaries of certain denominations, such as Mormons, were ineligible for religious visas because they did not possess a theology degree. Mormon missionaries from Schengen Area countries were allowed to work, however, because they did not require visas to enter the country.

The Federal Service for Combating Racism provided 36,000 Swiss francs (\$35,329) to fund three projects focusing on religious freedom, including religious discrimination and prejudice, and the Holocaust. The first project was an international conference that examined “Islamophobia;” the second project was a seminar on how to reduce societal prejudices towards people of different cultures and religions; and the third project was on the remaining Swiss Holocaust survivors.

Although not a requirement, schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum and to participate in the Holocaust Day of Remembrance on January 27.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and will assume the chair in 2017.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In June the Consulting Network for Racism Victims, a collaboration between the NGO humanrights.ch and the Federal Commission Against Racism, consisting of a network providing consulting and counseling services related to racism, released its report for 2015, documenting an increase in anti-Islamic incidents. The report cited migration, the crisis in Syria, and terror attacks by Islamic extremists as driving society's negative sentiments towards Muslims. According to the report, anti-Islamic incidents were predominantly verbal and occurred mainly at work and in neighborhoods.

The SIG recorded fewer anti-Semitic statements and acts in 2015, the latest year for which data were available, which it attributed to the de-escalation of the Gaza conflict and greater social awareness from the widespread media coverage of the many anti-Semitic incidents and subsequent criminal investigations that occurred in 2014. SIG also noted less anti-Semitic activity online in 2015. The *2015 Anti-Semitism Report*, produced jointly by SIG and the NGO Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, cited 16 anti-Semitic incidents (excluding anti-Semitic hate speech online) in the German-speaking part of the country in 2015, compared to 66 incidents in 2014. The report documented two incidents of physical assaults against Jews, one of which involved several men attacking an Orthodox Jew in Zurich. The Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against Anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) reported 164 anti-Semitic incidents in the French-speaking region of the country in 2015, the latest year for which data were available, 11 of which it deemed serious, characterized by "violent anti-Semitic insults in public places, including anti-Semitic letters, verbal abuse, and graffiti. Although CICAD also recorded a decrease in anti-Semitic incidents (down from 270 incidents in 2014), the report stressed the number of documented incidents in 2015 was among the highest during its 12-year existence. The report also noted most anti-Semitic incidents occurred during January and February, following the terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen.

On December 19, a gunman opened fire on worshippers at an Islamic center in Zurich, injuring three. The gunman fled the center and killed himself near the scene, according to police. The motive behind the shooting was still unknown by year's end.

In October the regional court of Bern-Mittelland in Bern Canton ruled a private company's 2015 dismissal of a Serbian Muslim woman for wearing a headscarf to work was illegal and ordered the business to award her financial compensation.

The court said the company's actions violated the right to religious freedom under the federal constitution.

A Sikh representative, Jowawar Singh, told local media that Sikh children who did not cut their hair for religious reasons had trouble being accepted at school or in vocational traineeships, and that numerous Sikh youth experienced difficulties finding apprenticeships.

Authorities expressed concern that police were not able to provide participants at ICCS rallies and public events with adequate protection because of the increasing public hostility towards the ICCS, after the ICCS publicly defended two Muslim boys for refusing to shake their teacher's hand.

A representative of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Zurich reported asylum seekers wanting to convert from Islam to Christianity were at risk of being intimidated and threatened by fellow Muslim asylum seekers for changing their faith. Ahmadi leaders reported many Muslim groups refused to recognize Ahmadi Muslims as followers of Islam and attempted to exclude them from opportunities to engage in joint dialogue with the government.

Islamic organizations, such as the Coordinated Islamic Organizations of Switzerland (KIOS), reported an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, which they attributed to the rise of political Islamism, ISIS, and the attacks in Brussels and Nice. According to KIOS, Muslim women wearing headscarves felt increasingly isolated and excluded from society and non-Muslim children shunned Muslim classmates in school.

Muslims told local media that anti-Muslim sentiment had noticeably increased since the rise and growing media presence of ISIS and the terror attacks in Brussels and Nice. Many Muslims said they felt pressured to defend Islam and their religious practices, and that Muslims were frequently discriminated against when seeking employment. While Muslim representatives stated societal discrimination against Muslims was a reflection of broader intolerance toward foreigners, many Muslims continued to say they suffered discrimination to a greater degree due to their religion.

In November SIG launched a police complaint against a neo-Nazi group, "Murder Command" (*Mordkommando*) for song lyrics calling for the death of Jews. The group had also issued death threats against leading Jews, including SIG President Herbert Winter, targeted politicians, and other public personalities.

The Consulting Network for Racism cited several instances of verbal abuse directed against Muslims. In one incident a man yelled “Dirty Arab!” to a woman wearing a headscarf and told her to return to her own country. In another incident, students harassed a Muslim teacher, telling her to “Put on the burqa, so that we don’t have to see your ugly face!” The students also taunted the teacher about her husband having a second wife. The report did not indicate whether the school punished the students or provide details on the incidents.

A survey by a national newspaper, *20 Minuten*, reported 41 percent of respondents viewed conservative Muslims more negatively following terrorist attacks in Europe and 73 percent of respondents were bothered by Muslim women wearing veils. Another subsequent survey by the same newspaper revealed only 38 percent of respondents believed Islam was consistent with national culture and identity, and 39 percent were against recognizing Islam as one of the country’s official religions.

According to media and NGO reports, during the year the main groups responsible for engaging in anti-Semitic rhetoric were Geneva Noncompliant, European Action, the League of the Ticino People, the Party of Nationally Oriented Swiss (PNOS), and the Swiss Nationalist Party, the French-speaking branch of PNOS. In October the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism filed a complaint against Swiss neo-Nazi band Amok and German neo-Nazi bands Stahlgewitter, Confident of Victory, Excess, and Frontalkraft for breaching the anti-racism law after they performed what they said were racist and anti-Semitic songs at what was widely described as a right-wing extremist concert attended by 6,000 people in the canton of St. Gallen earlier in October. In late October the PNOS celebrated the establishment of five new PNOS regional sections with a concert attended by 100 people in the canton of St. Gallen.

Many NGOs and representatives of the religious community coordinated interfaith events to promote tolerance locally and nationwide. The Week of Religions in November featured more than 100 interfaith events nationwide, including exhibitions, music and dance concerts, film screenings, roundtables, panel discussions, and communal dinners. The SIG, the Institute of Dialogue and Intercultural Cooperation, and other NGOs continued to support a project to address and eliminate misconceptions between Muslims and Jews. The Dialogue Institute also organized interfaith events ranging from lunches and dinners to movie nights, panel discussions, student exchanges, educational seminars, and lectures.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers discussed with the government's Office for Racism Prevention, which is responsible for matters related to religious discrimination, issues of access to non-Christian religious education in the cantons. In June the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials to discuss Nazi-looted art, the importance of transparency with respect to art provenance, and the country's 2017 chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Embassy officers met with NGOs including Katharina Werk, the Dialog Institute, and the House of Religions, representatives from civil society, and leaders from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities as well as representatives of other religious minorities, including the Bahai, Alevi Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Mormon communities, to discuss discrimination against religious groups as well as availability of religious education for religious minorities.

U.S. embassy staff participated in events promoting religious tolerance, such as an iftar, an Interreligious Women's Parliament hosted at Bern's House of Religions, and an interfaith prayer organized by the canton of St. Gallen's Interreligious Roundtable. The Ambassador spoke about the importance of religious freedom and tolerance at these events. U.S. embassy staff organized an interfaith Passover dinner, an iftar, and an interfaith Rosh Hashanah dinner to discuss religious tolerance and diversity with representatives of the Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Bahai, Alevi, and Buddhist communities.