

# AUSTRIA 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

Historical and modern constitutional and legal documents provide for freedom of religious belief and affiliation and prohibit religious discrimination. The law bans public incitement to hostile acts against religious groups if perceivable by a larger number of persons. The law divides recognized religious groups into three categories with varying rights; 16 groups recognized as religious societies have the most benefits. Unrecognized groups may practice their religion privately if the practice is lawful and does not offend “common decency.” Muslim groups criticized a ban on face coverings that went into force in October; violators were subject to a fine of 150 euros (\$180). Scientologists and some other religious minorities said several government-funded organizations continued to advise the public against associating with them, calling the groups “cults.” A government-funded study stated one third of mosques nurtured extremist views. The government worked with the Muslim community in a campaign against extremism and with a Jewish nongovernmental organization (NGO) to provide Holocaust training for teachers. Members of Muslim and Jewish groups and NGOs expressed concerns over what they considered anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic sentiment within the Freedom Party (FPÖ), which became a junior partner in a coalition government in December. In April the government adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism.

The head of the Jewish Community – “Israelitische Kultusgemeinde” (IKG) – reported a record 503 anti-Semitic incidents, including five assaults, during the year, up slightly from 2016 and 97 percent more than in 2014. The Muslim community reported 253 anti-Muslim incidents in 2016, a 62 percent increase over 2015. Most reported anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents involved threats, hate speech, and vandalism, and, in the case of Muslims, discrimination. In April an Afghan asylum seeker allegedly stabbed a Christian woman after she read from a Bible at a migrant center. An NGO attributed 61 percent of discrimination cases in the country to “Islamophobia.” Courts convicted seven individuals of anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi activity and two others for speaking out against Muslims or Islam, generally handing down fines or sentences, some of which they suspended. The Supreme Court upheld an injunction against a publication accused of slandering Holocaust victims for calling survivors of the Nazi-era Mauthausen concentration camp “criminals.” More than 300 imams issued a declaration in June condemning terrorism carried out in the name of Islam.

Embassy representatives met regularly with government officials to discuss religious groups' concerns about issues of freedom of religion and religious intolerance and the integration of religious minorities, including with officials from the Departments of Integration and Dialogue of Cultures within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Ministry of Interior. Topics included measures to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. They also met with religious group representatives, such as the leadership of the Islamic Faith Community (IGGIO), the IKG, the Roman Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Church of Scientology, to discuss their relations with the government, instances of discrimination, and interreligious dialogue. Embassy representatives participated in the International Advisory Board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency to promote remembrance of the Holocaust and spoke on the importance of religious freedom and tolerance at public ceremonies.

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

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.8 million (July 2017 estimate). According to religious groups and the government Austrian Integration Fund, Roman Catholics constitute 59 percent of the population and Muslims 8 percent, while approximately 25 percent is unaffiliated with any religion. Religious groups constituting less than 5 percent each include the Lutheran Church; Swiss Reformed Church (Evangelical Church-Augsburg and Helvetic confessions); Eastern Orthodox Churches (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian); Jehovah's Witnesses; other Christian churches; and Jews and other non-Christian religious groups.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

A combination of historical and modern constitutional documents guarantees freedom of "conscience and creed." The law provides for freedom of religious belief and the rights of all residents to join, participate in, leave, or abstain from association with any religious community. It stipulates, "Duties incumbent on nationals may not be impeded by religious affiliation."

Several constitutional provisions protect religious freedom. The main pillars are historical laws on fundamental rights and freedoms, including religious freedom, and treaties and conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which form part of the constitution. Antidiscrimination legislation prohibits

discrimination on religious grounds. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against a church group, religious society, or other religious group if the incitement is perceivable by “many people,” which an official government commentary on the law and the courts interpret as 30 or more individuals. The prohibition also applies specifically in the case of incitement in print, electronic, or other media available to a broad public. The law also prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against religious groups if such action violates human dignity.

The law divides registered religious groups into three officially recognized legal categories (listed in descending order of rights and privileges): religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Each category possesses specific rights, privileges, and legal responsibilities. Members of religious groups not legally recognized may practice their religion at home “insofar as this practice is neither unlawful nor offends common decency.”

There are 16 recognized religious societies: the Catholic Church, Protestant churches – specifically Lutheran and Presbyterian, called “Augsburg” and “Helvetic” confessions – the IGGIO, the Old Catholic Church, the IKG, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, the Buddhist Community, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Alevi Community in Austria, and the Free Christian Churches.

The law grants registered religious societies the right to public practice and independent administration of their internal affairs, to participate in the program requiring mandatory church contributions by church members, and to bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Under the law, religious societies have “public corporation” status, permitting them to engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities, such as government-funded religious instruction in both public and private schools, which the government denies to confessional communities and associations. The government grants all recognized religious societies tax relief in two main ways: donations are not taxable, and they receive exemption from property tax for all buildings dedicated to the active practice of religion or administration of such. Additionally, religious societies are exempt from the surveillance charge, payable

for instances where state security is required, and the administrative fee levied at the municipal level. Responsibilities of religious societies include a commitment to sponsor social and cultural activities that serve the common wellbeing and to ensure their teachings do not violate the law or ethical standards.

Religious groups seeking to achieve religious society status for the first time must apply for recognition with the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery. Religious groups recognized as societies prior to 1998 retained their status. The government grandfathered in 14 of the 16 recognized religious societies under this provision of the law. In order to gain recognition as a religious society, religious groups not recognized prior to 1998 must have membership equaling 0.2 percent of the country's population (approximately 17,400 persons) and have been in existence for 20 years, at least 10 of which must have been as an association and five as a confessional community. The government recognizes Jehovah's Witnesses and Alevi Muslims as religious societies under these post-1998 criteria. Groups that do not meet these criteria may still apply for religious society status under an exception for groups that have been active internationally for at least 100 years and active as an association in the country for 10 years. Groups sharing a broad faith with an existing society or confessional community, for example Christianity, may register separately as long as they can demonstrate that their group has a different theology.

The law allows religious groups not recognized as societies to seek official status as confessional communities with the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery. The government recognizes eight groups as confessional communities: the Bahai Faith, the Movement for Religious Renewal-Community of Christians, the Pentecostal Community of God, Seventh-day Adventists, the Hindu Community, the Islamic-Shia Community, the Old-Alevi Community in Austria, and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church).

A recognized confessional community has the juridical standing needed to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in its own name and contracting for goods and services, but it is not eligible for the financial and educational benefits available to recognized religious societies. Contributions to their charitable activities are tax deductible for those who make them, but confessional communities are not exempt from property taxes.

In order to gain government recognition as a confessional community, a group must have at least 300 members and submit to the Office for Religious Affairs its

statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members, as well as membership regulations, a list of officials, and financing information. A group must also submit a written description of its religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any previously recognized religious society or religious confessional community. The Office for Religious Affairs determines whether the group's basic beliefs are consistent with public security, order, health, and morals, and with the rights and freedoms of citizens. A religious group seeking to obtain confessional community status is subject to a six-month waiting period from the time of application to the chancellery. After this period, groups that have applied automatically receive the status unless the government issues a decree rejecting the application.

Religious groups not qualifying for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become legal associations, a status applicable to a broad range of civil groups. Some groups organize as associations while waiting for the government to recognize them as confessional communities.

The Church of Scientology and a number of smaller religious groups, such as Sahaja Yoga and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have status as associations.

Religious groups registered as associations have the right to function in public, but they may not provide religious instruction in schools or pastoral care in hospitals or prisons.

According to the law, any group of more than two persons pursuing a nonprofit goal qualifies to organize as an association. Groups may apply to the Ministry of Interior to gain such status. In order to become an association, groups have to submit a written statement citing their common, nonprofit goal and commitment to function as a nonprofit organization. Associations have juridical standing and many of the same rights as confessional communities, such as the right to own real estate and to contract for goods and services.

The law governing relations between the government and the IGGIO and Alevi groups stipulates that funding for the day-to-day operations of mosques must be derived from domestic sources, Islamic teachings and practices must not violate federal law, and Islamic institutions should "take a positive stance" toward the state and society. The law provides an explicit legal definition of, and legal protection for, Islamic practices, such as circumcision and preparation of food in conformity with religious rules, and states Muslims may raise children and youth

in accordance with Islamic traditions. Muslim groups with at least 300 members and a theology that is not distinct from a pre-existing Islamic religious society or confessional community are considered cultural communities and fall under the umbrella of the pre-existing, legally recognized Islamic religious society or confessional community: the IGGIO and the Alevi Community in Austria, which are both religious societies, or the Islamic-Shiite Community or the Old-Alevi Faith Community in Austria, which have confessional community status. The law allows for Islamic theological university studies, which began for the first time at the University of Vienna in the fall.

Separate laws govern relations between the government and each of the other 14 state-recognized religious societies. The laws have similar intent but vary in specifics, given that they were enacted at different times over a span of approximately 140 years.

In May parliament adopted a law banning full-face covers in public places as a “violation of Austrian values,” with exceptions made only for artistic, cultural, or traditional events; in sports; or for health or professional reasons. The law went into effect on October 1. Failure to comply with the law is an administrative violation. The law prescribes a 150 euro (\$180) fine but does not entitle police to remove the face covering.

The government funds religious instruction for children on a proportional basis in public schools, government-accredited private schools, and places of worship for any of the 16 officially recognized religious societies. The government does not offer such funding to other religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. Attendance in religious classes is mandatory for all students unless they formally withdraw at the beginning of the school year; students under the age of 14 require parental permission to withdraw from religious classes. The government funds the instruction, and religious groups provide the instructors. Religious instruction takes place either in the school or at sites organized by religious groups. Some schools offer ethics classes for students not attending religious instruction. Religious education and ethics classes include the tenets of different religious groups as comparative religious education.

The curriculum for both public and private schools includes compulsory anti-bias and tolerance education, including religious tolerance, as part of civics education across various subjects, including history and German-language instruction.

Holocaust education is part of history instruction and appears in other subjects such as civics.

The Equal Rights Agency, an independent agency falling under the jurisdiction of the women's ministry, oversees discrimination cases on various grounds, including religion. The agency provides legal counseling and mediation services, and it assists with bringing cases before the Equal Treatment Commission, another independent government agency. In cases where it finds discrimination, the commission makes a recommendation for corrective action. In case of noncompliance with the recommendation, the case goes to court. Only a court may order corrective action and compensation.

The law bans neo-Nazi activity and prohibits public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification of the Nazi genocide or other Nazi crimes against humanity in print, broadcast, or other media.

Foreign religious workers for groups recognized as confessional communities or associations must apply for a general immigrant visa that is not employment or family based, and is subject to a quota. The government requires a visa for visitors from non-visa waiver countries or individuals who would stay beyond 90 days, including religious workers of confessional communities or associations. Foreign religious workers belonging to religious societies do not require visas for either shorter visits or stays beyond 90 days.

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

### **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph:* Police continued to protect Jewish sites. Muslims said the ban on face veils in public violated basic rights. The city government in Vienna increased inspections of city-subsidized Islamic kindergartens after a study found "Islamic political influence" in several of them. A federally funded office continued to offer the public negative views about religious groups, such as Scientology, which it described as "cults." A government-funded study stated one third of mosques nurtured extremist views. The foreign ministry worked with the IGGIO on a campaign against extremism. The education ministry worked with the international NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to provide Holocaust training for teachers. Jewish and Muslim groups and NGOs expressed concerns about what they regarded as anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim

sentiment in the FPÖ, which joined a coalition government with the People's Party in December. In April the government adopted the IHRA's definition of anti-Semitism, which the IKG called a milestone in fighting anti-Semitism.

Some religious minority groups, such as the Unification Church, continued to complain the three-tier system of categorizing legally recognized religious groups only granted them second- or third-class status.

The police continued to provide extra protection to the Vienna Jewish community's offices and other Jewish community institutions such as schools and museums. Law enforcement authorities stated the government provided the protection due to general concerns over the potential for anti-Semitic acts against Jewish institutions.

On various occasions, the IGGIO called on the Ministry of Justice to fund pastoral care for Muslims in prisons, where 46 IGGIO imams provided such care. According to the IGGIO, government funding would allow it to expand prison pastoral care. The ministry replied that it already funded social workers and representatives from the NGO De-radicalization Network to work with Muslim prisoners it considered extremists.

Muslim representatives expressed concern that the new ban on full-face coverings would push women wearing face veils into further isolation and, together with the Bar Association and Amnesty International, argued the law violated such basic rights as freedom of religion and expression. While characterizing the wearing of face veils in public as "socially undesirable," the Catholic Church also criticized the ban as an "exaggerated legal prohibition." A Viennese psychology student who was fined in October for covering her face while cycling announced she would challenge the ban before the Administrative Court.

On January 6, then-Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz of the People's Party advocated for a ban on headscarves for public servants, including teachers, reigniting public debate over displays of religious symbols in public. Kurz stated Christian crucifixes in classrooms should be allowed, as they symbolized the country's "historic culture." A representative of the IGGIO and a representative of the IKG both publicly opposed the headscarf ban proposal as discriminatory.

Approximately 2,000 persons participated in a February 4 demonstration against the stipulation in the government's agenda, announced January 30, that women working as uniformed police, judges, or prosecutors were to be prohibited from

wearing headscarves. Several Muslim groups, some of them affiliated with the IGGIO, staged the protests. The President of the Islamic Faith Community, Ibrahim Olgun, said the proposed ban for police, judges, and prosecutors would “pull the rug” out from under efforts to create a good working relationship between the government and the Muslim community.

In remarks made to schoolchildren in March and broadcast on television in April, President Alexander Van der Bellen expressed opposition to restrictions on clothing, telling the students women had the right to dress how they wanted and that “if this rampant Islamophobia continues ... we must ask all women to wear a headscarf – all – out of solidarity with those who do it for religious reasons.” The president’s office said he believed restrictions were justified when applied to all religious symbols in certain circumstances, such as for female judges, where religious dress could raise questions about neutrality.

The government continued to apply a policy of banning headwear in official identification documents with an exception for religious purposes as long as the face was sufficiently visible to allow for identification of the wearer.

In June the Vienna city government increased its inspections of the 150 Islamic kindergartens subsidized by the city after University of Vienna professor Ednan Aslan stated in a study of Islamic kindergartens he conducted in 2016 that there was political Islamic influence in several of them, and they were helping to create “parallel societies.”

The federal Office of Sect Issues continued to offer advice to persons with questions about groups that it considered “sects” and “cults.” The office was nominally independent but government funded, and the minister for family and youth appointed and supervised its head. Some Scientologists and representatives of the Unification Church continued to state the Office of Sect Issues and other government-associated entities fostered societal discrimination against religious groups not registered as religious societies or confessional communities.

A counseling center in Vienna managed by the Society against Sect and Cult Dangers, an NGO working against some religious groups, such as Scientology, continued to distribute information to schools and the general public, and it provided counseling for former members of such groups. According to the website of the society’s founder, Friedrich Griess, the society received funding from the government of Lower Austria. Several other provinces funded family and youth counseling offices that provided information on “sects and cults,” which members

of some minority religious groups, such as Scientologists or the Unification Church, stated they considered to be negatively biased.

An amendment of transportation regulations in June stipulated the use of public roads and sidewalks for non-traffic purposes must not violate public safety and security. Based on the amendment, government representatives stated police could ban proselytizing by religious groups. There were no reports that police blocked such activity.

According to a study by the Austrian Integration Fund, financed by the Ministry for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs and based on 16 mosques examined by the authors, one-third of the mosques examined were actively countering efforts to integrate Muslims by nurturing extremist views.

According to a George Washington University study, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria,” the Muslim Brotherhood had “substantial connections and influence” in the country, including over key functions affecting Muslim immigrants, such as in the IGGIO’s training institute for Islamic religion teachers. The study, which the Austrian Security Services commissioned, was done in cooperation with the University of Vienna and the Austrian Integration Fund and released in September. An official involved with the study stated the Muslim Brotherhood represented values that stood in contrast to the rule of law and promoted a political Islam that divided society. In reaction, FPÖe Chair Heinz Christian Strache called for stricter action against radical Islamist activities. A Muslim youth leader privately rejected the report’s conclusions and methodology and complained about what he described as the “continuous drip” of biased studies against Muslims in the country. The organization Muslim Youth of Austria also rejected the study’s findings, which stated the organization received financial support from the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the IGGIO, undertook an information campaign in mosques, Islamic organizations, and community centers, distributing written materials to convey the message that jihadism violated the principles of Islam.

The Ministry for Education and Women conducted teacher-training projects with the ADL. Seminars were available on Holocaust education, and Holocaust survivors talked to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

Chancellor Christian Kern as well as Catholic and Jewish representatives attended an IGGIO-hosted iftar in June to express support for the Muslim Community.

In July FPOe Member of Parliament Johannes Huebner announced he would not seek reelection in the October parliamentary election, following widespread protests over a 2016 statement he made that critics said contained anti-Semitic undertones. In a speech on “mass migration to Austria,” Huebner had referred to “so-called Holocaust victims” who were criticizing the FPOe.

On September 13, Norbert Hofer, FPOe Deputy Chair, presented an election platform for the October 15 parliamentary elections with rhetoric including a statement that “Islam is not part of Austria.” At the presentation, FPOe Chair Strache stated, “We must not become strangers in our own home country.” The party campaigned against immigration and “Islamization,” and FPOe billboards carried the slogan “Islamization must be stopped.”

Speaking to the press in September, Vienna City Councilor, and previous integration representative for the Islamic Community Omar al-Rawi stated, “When parties address the issue of Islam, it’s always in a negative context.”

Some local Jewish groups expressed concern about anti-Semitism in the FPOe.

In November FPOe Chair Strache suspended a local FPOe councilor in Styria for giving a “Heil Hitler” salute.

NGOs and Jewish and Muslim community members called on the People’s Party, which came in first place in the parliamentary elections, not to form a coalition government with the FPOe, which came in third. In October the Mauthausen Komitee, a group commemorating Nazi camp victims, published a list of what it said were at least 60 anti-Semitic and racist incidents involving FPOe figures since 2013. Ramazan Demir, a Vienna-based imam and a leading representative of the IGGIO, stated, “This election result is something we feared ... There’s never been this much Islamophobia in Austria.” The NGO SOS Mitmensch (SOS Fellow Human Being) released a letter it wrote to People’s Party leader Kurz, citing allegations of FPOe officials’ involvement in right-wing extremist, and neo-Nazi activities.

The People’s Party formed a coalition with the FPOe, and the new government assumed office on December 18, with Kurz as Chancellor and FPOe leader Strache as Vice Chancellor. The new government’s coalition agreement included acknowledgement of the country’s role in the Holocaust and a pledge to fight anti-Semitism. As party chair, Strache had repeatedly called for zero tolerance for anti-

Semitism or glorification of Nazism, most recently in the context of the presentation of the coalition government's program.

IKG Vienna President Oskar Deutsch continued to express concerns about the FPÖ, which he said was an anti-Semitic party, and its attempts to appeal to Jewish voters by rebranding itself as an anti-Muslim party.

Then-Justice Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter established the special prosecutor's office for right-wing extremism in April. The office focused on enforcing the law banning neo-Nazi activity.

The government made the Mauthausen Memorial Agency an independent government agency on January 1, providing it with a legal base to implement tasks mandated in a 2016 law, which set the goal of Holocaust commemoration and education as the agency's prime task. Mauthausen was the country's largest concentration camp during the Nazi era and became a national monument.

Chancellor Kern, during an April visit to Israel, met with Holocaust survivors of Austrian background. In a speech he emphasized his country's responsibility for the "darkest chapters in Austria's history" and its commitment to learn from its Nazi past and to combat anti-Semitism.

On April 25, the cabinet adopted the IHRA's definition of anti-Semitism. Then-Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz termed the decision an important signal to identify and combat anti-Semitism more easily with a commonly acknowledged definition. IKG Vienna President Deutsch welcomed the decision as a "milestone in combating anti-Semitism."

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

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

*Summary paragraph:* The IKG reported a record 503 anti-Semitic incidents during the year, slightly more than in 2016 and 97 percent more than in 2014. Incidents included five assaults, as well as threats, insults, harassment, hate speech, and vandalism. According to the IKG, right-wing persons were responsible for almost a quarter of incidents and Muslims for another 10 percent. The IKG Vienna president expressed concern that it had become more socially acceptable to make anti-Semitic statements. The IGGIO reported 253 anti-Muslim incidents in 2016,

62 percent more than in 2015. Most incidents involved discrimination, hate speech, verbal attacks, and vandalism. The Ministry of Interior reported 41 anti-Semitic and 38 anti-Muslim incidents in 2016. In April an Afghan refugee allegedly stabbed a Christian woman reading from a Bible at a migrant center. An NGO reported 61 percent of cases of discrimination in the country were due to “Islamophobia,” and female Muslim students were the targets in 73 percent of discrimination cases in schools. In January the Supreme Court upheld an injunction in a slander case against a publication, *Aula*, which had published an article calling survivors of the former Mauthausen concentration camp “criminals.” In June more than 300 imams condemned terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. Catholic and Muslim groups engaged in activities promoting interfaith understanding.

In April the interior ministry released statistics according to which there were 41 anti-Semitic and 28 anti-Muslim incidents reported to police in 2016, compared with 41 and 31 incidents, respectively, in 2015. The majority of cases involved hate speech on the internet. There were several cases of neo-Nazi-related hate speech, including on the internet, as well as cases of persons giving the Hitler salute or shouting Nazi slogans.

IKG Vienna President Deutsch expressed concerns that anti-Semitism remained at a “high but stable” level. The IKG’s Forum against Anti-Semitism said it received an all-time high of 503 reports of anti-Semitic incidents during the year, up from 477 in 2016 and 97 percent more than the 255 incidents reported in 2014. The 503 incidents included five physical assaults (down from seven in 2016), in addition to insults, verbal, written, and telephoned threats and harassment, complaints about the internet and social media, and vandalism. Insults and threats increased by 17 percent to 28, incidents involving the internet rose by 12 percent to 171, and those involving letters and telephone calls rose 3 percent to 203. Cases involving vandalism or damage to property declined by 25 percent to 51. The other 45 incidents fell under the category of “other.” .

According to the Forum Against Anti-Semitism, increased awareness and reporting was one of several factors that explained the eight-fold increase in anti-Semitic incidents recorded since 2006, but there was also a declining stigma associated with anti-Semitic views. The IKG noted rising fears of a “new Islamic anti-Semitism” from Muslim refugees, although it still attributed the majority of anti-Semitic incidents to right-wing groups. The forum said that of the 503 incidents reported during the year, right-wing persons accounted for 24 percent, Muslims for 10 percent, left-wing persons 3 percent, and unspecified perpetrators for the other

62 percent. IKG President Deutsch expressed concern that there were fewer inhibitions among the anti-Semitic perpetrators in voicing anti-Semitism, and that it had generally become more socially acceptable to make such statements.

The IGGIO's documentation center reported the number of reports of anti-Muslim incidents it received had been increasing since it began collecting such statistics in mid-2014. In 2016, the center received 253 reports of anti-Muslim incidents, compared with 156 cases in 2015. According to the center, 98 percent of all incidents were directed against women. Two-thirds of cases involved verbal attacks and hate speech, the rest graffiti, discrimination, and other acts. The center stated it believed a large number of cases were related to the 2016 presidential election campaign.

In April according to the NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan stabbed and injured a Christian woman in a migrant center after he heard her reading from the Bible. Her alleged attacker was a man who the NGO said was offended that Christian residents of the center had invited the woman to discuss the Bible.

According to the Equal Rights Agency, 173 cases of religious discrimination came before the equal rights commissioner in 2016, compared with 131 cases in 2015. The agency did not provide additional information on the nature of the cases, the groups targeted, or how it addressed these cases.

Female Muslim students made up more than 73 percent of the total number of individuals subjected to discrimination at schools in 2016, according to a report by the NGO Initiative for Discrimination-Free Education. The report listed a total of 47 cases of discrimination in schools and attributed 61 percent of these cases to "Islamophobia."

A report by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency on the situation of Muslims in Europe released in September found Austria was among those EU member states to which Muslims felt least attached. The report, for which only Muslims of Turkish background in the country were interviewed, said that, on a scale of 1-5, where five was the highest, Muslims' sense of attachment to the country was 3.5, while the EU average was 4.1. On the other hand, according to the report, only 15 percent of Muslims interviewed in the country complained about ethnic profiling by police – substantially below the EU average of 32 percent.

Bishop Manfred Scheuer resigned as president of the Catholic organization Pax Christi because of expressions of anti-Semitism within the organization and at a Pax Christi event, according to media reports. Pax Christi stated it had issued statements critical of Israel but denied they had contained anti-Semitic undertones.

In January the Supreme Court upheld a preliminary injunction against a publication alleged to be slandering Holocaust survivors, forbidding German author Manfred Duswald from calling Mauthausen concentration camp survivors “criminals and a widespread nuisance.” Duswald made the statements in a 2015 article that appeared in the monthly *Aula*, a publication the Vienna-based anti-Semitism NGO Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance called an extreme right-wing pamphlet and “FPOe-leaning.” Holocaust survivors and Green Party Member of Parliament Harald Walser filed a collective lawsuit on civil law claims and media law charges in 2016 after a Graz court in early 2016 dismissed an investigation against the paper under the anti-neo-Nazi law, sparking a protest among the Mauthausen survivors.

In January a court in Upper Austria State convicted a man who had sold pro-Nazi songs on an internet forum, which authorities had shut down in 2012, of engaging in neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity and sentenced him to 33 months in prison.

In January a court in Vienna convicted a man of incitement for calling women wearing burkas “garbage bags” on his website and sentenced him to a five-month suspended prison sentence.

In March a court in Salzburg convicted a man of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity for flying a kite with Nazi symbols and sentenced him to two years in prison. The court sentenced his accomplice to a three-month suspended prison sentence in June.

In July a court in Lower Austria State convicted a man of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity for performing a Nazi salute and sentenced him to two years in prison.

In July a court in Innsbruck convicted and fined a local FPOe official on charges of denouncing religious teachings for calling Islam an “insane ideology” on the internet.

In August a Vienna court convicted a soccer fan of engaging in neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity for performing a Nazi salute during a soccer game and sentenced him to 18 months in prison.

In September a court in Vorarlberg convicted a German citizen to a 10-month suspended prison sentence and a fine after convicting him of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity. He had sent a picture on a messaging service of headwear adorned with the swastika and skulls, with the message: “Dear refugees, you will recognize your caseworker by these hats.”

In September a court in Carinthia State convicted a man who had posted a call on Facebook for the reopening of a Hitler-era concentration camp and the gassing of migrants there, of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity and sentenced him to a 14-month suspended prison sentence and a fine.

In September the public prosecutor’s office in Innsbruck launched an investigation of charges of neo-Nazi activity against a local FPÖ official accused of possessing Nazi memorabilia. The Tyrolean chapter of the FPÖ expelled the official from the party.

On June 14, more than 300 imams signed a joint declaration condemning international terrorism carried out in the name of Islam and appealing to all Muslims to contribute to living together peacefully in the country.

In July the Catholic Church established the Commission on World Religions, consisting of 21 experts tasked with promoting interreligious dialogue, in particular with Islam. The commission focused on issues of joint concern for Christians and Muslims, including human rights and the rule of law.

In September the IGGIO staged a human chain in Vienna, from an Islamic center to a Catholic church, as a symbol of religious tolerance and mutual respect. Muslim, Catholic, and Buddhist representatives participated.

On November 9, to commemorate victims of anti-Jewish pogroms, leaders of Christian churches and the IKG sent an open letter entitled “Never Again” to the newly elected parliament, expressing concern about “flared-up thinking” indicating anti-Semitic tendencies and other prejudices and appealing to members to reject it. Other commemoration events included a vigil and “light of hope” march through Vienna and prayers in churches.

Fourteen Christian churches, among them the Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, and eight Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches, continued to meet within the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria. Baptists and the Salvation Army had observer status on the council. The Council met twice a year. There were two permanent working groups, on “Religion and Society” and “Media.”

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

The U.S. Ambassador, Charge d’Affaires, and other embassy representatives met regularly with government officials, including with the Department for Integration and Division of Dialogue of Cultures at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Ministry of Interior, to discuss religious freedom. Topics discussed included the concerns of religious groups, the integration of Muslim refugees, cooperation with religious groups in combating terrorism, and measures to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Embassy representatives continued to meet frequently with religious leaders and community members throughout the country, including with the leadership and membership of the IGGIO, IKG, Catholic Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, and other Christian organizations, as well as the Church of Scientology, to discuss the relationship between these groups and the government, discriminatory or inflammatory incidents, and the role of religious education in encouraging interfaith tolerance.

The embassy continued to engage with and support the Jewish community to promote religious tolerance and combat anti-Semitism. Embassy representatives participated in the International Advisory Board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency to promote remembrance of the Holocaust and Holocaust education and advocated continued efforts of the agency to pursue increased youth outreach to combat anti-Semitism among youth.

The Charge d’Affaires hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for the Muslim community, where he spoke on the importance of religious freedom and religious tolerance.

In an interview at a May ceremony marking the end of the Second World War and the liberation from National Socialism, a senior embassy official emphasized the principal lesson was the importance of guaranteeing religious tolerance. The Charge d’Affaires and the Charge d’Affaires of the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, headquartered in Vienna, attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration

camp in May, and the embassy Charge d’Affaires made remarks noting the importance of upholding religious freedom.