

THE NETHERLANDS 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects the freedom of individuals to profess their religion or belief. It is a crime to engage in public speech inciting religious hatred. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) and municipal antidiscrimination boards continued to address individual complaints of discrimination, such as the denial of internships or employment to female Muslim students who refused to remove their headscarves. The government implemented its national action plan to counter discrimination, which included specific measures to counter anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment. Local governments provided security to all Jewish institutions and, upon request, to Islamic institutions. Amsterdam authorities replaced on-site police surveillance of more than 30 Jewish cultural sites with cameras. The leader of the Political Calvinist Party (SGP) and the Israeli Ambassador filed complaints against a member of The Hague City Council for making anti-Semitic statements about Israeli students visiting parliament.

The government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported hundreds of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, the most recent year for which data were available. Most incidents included verbal or written harassment or insults, threats, and vandalism. There were also several cases of violence and instances of discrimination. An EU survey found 72 percent of Muslims believed religious or ethnic discrimination was widespread in the country. An NGO called for measures to stop anti-Semitic chanting at soccer matches and expressed concern about the common use of “Jew” as a term of insult. Two nationalist groups regularly staged protests against Islamic institutions. Members of religious groups and NGOs engaged in activities and conducted outreach programs to counter prejudice against Jews and Muslims.

The U.S. embassy in The Hague and consulate general in Amsterdam emphasized to government officials, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, parliamentarians, and police in formal meetings and informal conversations, support for refugees of all faiths, the importance of integration for newcomers, and the value of interfaith dialogue. Embassy and consulate general representatives discussed religious freedom issues with different faith communities and civil society activists and pursued public outreach to youth, academics, and women to

increase interfaith understanding and tolerance. The embassy also discussed religious tolerance with refugees.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 17.1 million (July 2017 estimate). In a 2014 survey by the government's Statistics Netherlands, 49 percent of the population declared no church affiliation, 24 percent self-identified as Roman Catholic, 7 percent as Reformed, 6 percent as Calvinist, 3 percent as other Protestant denominations, 5 percent as Muslim, and 6 percent as "other," including Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, and Bahai.

Most Muslims live in urban areas and are of Turkish, Moroccan, or Surinamese background. The Muslim population also includes recent immigrants and asylum seekers from other countries, including Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tel Aviv University's Stephen Roth Institute, a research institute, and the Council of Europe estimate the Jewish population at approximately 30,000. A 2008 report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy identified a Hindu population of between 100,000 and 215,000, of whom approximately 85 percent are of Surinamese descent and 10 percent of Indian descent. The Buddhist community has approximately 17,000 members, according to a 2007 report by the governmental Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), the latest estimate available.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and provides for the freedom of individuals to profess their religion or belief, individually or in community with others, without affecting their responsibilities under the law. The constitution allows the government to restrict the exercise of religious beliefs outside of buildings or enclosed spaces to protect health, for traffic safety, or to prevent disorder.

The law makes it a crime to engage in public speech that incites religious hatred, and provides a penalty of imprisonment for up to two years, a fine of up to 8,100 euros (\$9,700), or both. To qualify as hate speech, the statements must be directed at a group of people; the law does not consider statements targeted at a philosophy or religion, such as "Islam" as opposed to "Muslims," as criminal hate speech.

The law permits employees to refuse to work on Sundays for religious reasons, but employers may deny employees such an exception depending on the nature of the work, such as employment in the health sector. Members of religious communities for whom the Sabbath is not Sunday may request similar exemptions.

The law does not require religious groups to register with the government. If the tax authorities determine the groups meet specific criteria, they grant the groups exemptions from all taxes, including income, value added, and property taxes. Under the tax law, institutions must be “of a philosophical or religious nature,” contribute to the general welfare of society, and be nonprofit and nonviolent to qualify for tax exemptions.

A number of national institutions, including the Council of State and the NIHR, are responsible for reviewing complaints of religious discrimination. Additionally, the NIHR advises the government on issues involving religious discrimination.

Local governments appoint antidiscrimination boards that work independently under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. These local boards provide information on how to report complaints and mediate disputes, including those pertaining to discrimination based on religion. Acceptance of mediation decisions by parties involved in disputes is voluntary.

The government provides funding to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and religious health-care facilities. To qualify for funding, institutions have to meet government educational standards as well as minimum class size and health-care requirements. The constitution stipulates that standards required of religious or ideology-based (termed “special”) schools, financed either in part or fully by the government, shall be regulated by law with due regard for the freedom of these schools to provide education according to their religion or ideology.

The constitution stipulates public education shall pay due respect to the individual’s religion or belief, and the law permits, but does not require religious education in public schools. Regular teaching staff teach religion classes. All schools are obligated to familiarize students with the various spiritual movements in society, regardless of the school’s religious affiliation. Religion-based schools are free to shape religious education, as long as the education inspectorate agrees that such education does not incite criminal offenses.

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

Government Practices

Summary Paragraph: The government provided security to all Jewish institutions and to Muslims institutions upon request and established a working group to discuss mosque security. It barred religious groups from proselytizing at asylum centers. The government and Jewish and Muslim groups amended an agreement to allow for better protection of animal welfare while preserving the groups' requirements of ritual slaughter. Party for Freedom (PVV) parliamentarian Geert Wilders continued calls for "de-Islamization" of the country. The government issued a report expressing concerns about Salafist groups. It continued to require Muslim religious leaders recruited from Islamic countries to complete an integration course before engaging in religious work in the country. The government also announced measures to combat anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic sentiment as part of an updated action plan to combat discrimination. A Muslim member of The Hague City Council called Israeli students visiting parliament "future child murderers."

The national government established a special working group to discuss security questions concerning mosques, which included representatives of the Muslim community, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security, police, and Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Following a January 29 attack on a mosque in Canada, members of the working group convened and adopted a "Safe Mosque" manual. The manual helped bolster local cooperation among local government, police, and mosque officials. The mayors of Amsterdam and Rotterdam also met with representatives of various mosques in their cities to discuss security.

Local governments, in consultation with the national government, continued to provide all Jewish institutions with security and to provide security to Muslim institutions at their request. Amsterdam authorities were finalizing the replacement of 18 police-manned booths in favor of camera surveillance in Jewish sites throughout the city.

The NIHR and municipal antidiscrimination boards continued to address individual complaints of discrimination, such as the denial of internships or employment to female Muslim students who refused to remove their headscarves. The rulings generally maintained that any restriction on wearing headscarves should be limited and based on security or other carefully delineated grounds pertaining to the nature of the work, for example, applied to members of the military and medical

personnel on operating floors. In practice, headscarves were permitted almost everywhere, including in schools.

According to several religious community leaders, the government did not allow religiously affiliated organizations to proselytize at asylum centers. The government agency charged with overseeing asylum centers, the Central Body for Accommodating Asylum Seekers, said it instituted this policy to avoid inflaming any tensions among different religious groups housed together in an already sensitive environment. Some members of religious groups said they had difficulty gaining access to the centers, even as volunteers. One member of an evangelical church said its members prayed in front of asylum centers but were not allowed to pray inside.

In July Jewish and Muslim organizations signed an agreement with the government and slaughterhouses amending a 2012 accord allowing ritual slaughter, to better protect animal welfare while preserving the requirements of ritual slaughter.

PVV leader and opposition parliamentarian Geert Wilders, whose party won 20 of the 150 seats in parliament in March elections, continued to call for the “de-Islamization” of the country. He advocated refusing all asylum seekers and immigrants from Islamic countries, banning the burqa in all public spaces, closing all mosques and Islamic schools, banning the Quran, and prohibiting any Islamic expression that violated public order. On November 3, Wilders called for mass protests against Islamization. He tweeted “Enough is enough. It is time to resist. Organize mass demonstrations. Reclaim our country. Fight back Islamization.”

Wilders appealed a December 2016 court conviction for inciting discrimination and insulting a racial group for his remarks about Moroccans at a 2014 rally. He argued his statements were protected free speech. The appeal hearing was scheduled for 2018.

In September the Ministry of Justice and Security’s Research and Documentation Center issued a report stating Salafist organizations were growing in the country and propagating intolerance toward others. In a letter submitting the report to parliament, then-Minister of Justice and Security Stef Blok and then-Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher expressed concern that Salafist doctrines triggered intimidation, incited hatred against others, and undermined democratic institutions and the rule of law. The letter, however, opposed banning Salafist organizations as contrary to freedom of religion. The ministers said they were not taking a position on what individuals believed but “on preservation of an open society.” The

ministers stated national and local authorities could take actions against undesirable conduct by groups such as Salafists, especially with regard to public security, while seeking interaction and dialogue with those and other groups. In the fall the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced it was working closely with its embassies abroad to ensure transparency in the foreign funding of Salafist mosques in the country.

Government ministers, including Prime Minister Mark Rutte at the annual Auschwitz and Kristallnacht commemorations, regularly spoke out against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in speeches. On February 3, then-Deputy Prime Minister Asscher stated, “We are working with the religious communities on a society in which everyone can practice his religion in freedom and safety.”

Then-Ministers Blok and Asscher met regularly with the Jewish community to discuss measures to counter anti-Semitism. The government worked with youth and relevant NGOs on several projects addressing anti-Semitism. These projects included making anti-Semitism a subject of discussion within the Turkish community; establishing a help desk to facilitate projects combating anti-Semitism; organizing roundtables with teachers to train them to deal with anti-Semitic prejudice and Holocaust denial; holding discussions with social media organizations on countering anti-Semitism among Islamic youth; promoting an interreligious dialogue primarily between Muslims and Jews; and renewing a public information campaign against discrimination and anti-Semitism.

In the spring, the government announced specific measures to counter anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiment in the update to its national action plan to counter discrimination. The plan cited a need for more Jewish and Muslim role models from business, education, and government to promote dialogue between members of those two communities. In a June 22 letter to parliament, then-Ministers Blok and Asscher said, as part of the action plan, the government was supporting community projects to strengthen interreligious dialogue between Jews and Muslims. The ministers said six cities (which they did not identify) were assessing best practices for advancing interreligious dialogue that could serve as an example for other cities.

As part of the action plan, the government consulted the Royal Netherlands Soccer Association, local authorities, police officials, the prosecutor’s office, and soccer clubs, on ways to counter anti-Semitic chanting, salutes, and other behavior directed against religious groups during soccer matches. Participants agreed on measures to prosecute offenders or ban them from stadiums. The Anne Frank

Foundation, an NGO, organized government-sponsored projects, such as the “Fan Coach” project to counter anti-Semitic chanting by educating soccer fans on why their actions were anti-Semitic, and the “Fair Play” project to promote discussion on discrimination, including religious discrimination.

To combat anti-Muslim discrimination, the national action plan focused on enhancing the readiness of the Muslim community to report incidents, reinforcing the resilience of Muslim organizations, and improving local cooperation between the Muslim community and local authorities. As part of this effort, authorities conducted regional meetings in which representatives of local governments, police, antidiscrimination bureaus, and Muslim communities discussed ways to improve collaboration.

In June the leader of the SGP, Kees van der Staaij, and the Israeli Ambassador filed complaints with the police against The Hague City Council member Abdoe Khouhani of the Islamist Party of Unity, after he characterized Israeli students visiting parliament as “Zionist terrorists” and “future child murderers.” Reacting to Van der Staaij’s complaint, Khouhani called him “a spokesman of Zionism, hypocrite to the bone, Islamophobic, Christian Zionist.” On November 8, the prosecutor’s office in The Hague announced it would not prosecute Khouhani because it concluded the statements did not constitute a criminal offense.

The government continued to require asylum seekers seeking to obtain a residence permit to sign a statement of participation in civic integration. The statement informed immigrants of their rights and obligations and of fundamental values, including freedom of religion.

According to the NGO Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI), Jewish community leaders stated the school curriculum lacked sufficient coverage of the Holocaust. On March 21, Deputy Minister for Education Sander Dekker spoke at a conference underscoring the importance of Holocaust education. He viewed schools as a safe place for children to hear “the right story,” because “we see that they [students] are taught the wrong facts and ideas in other places.” Dekker stated it could be difficult for teachers to discuss the Holocaust, especially at schools with a high percentage of minorities.

The government continued to require imams and other spiritual leaders recruited from Islamic countries to complete an integration course before preaching religion in the country. This requirement did not apply to approximately 140 Turkish imams appointed by that country’s religious affairs directorate. The government

also sponsored leadership courses, with the declared intention of facilitating imam training in the Dutch language free of foreign interference.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Summary Paragraph: The government and NGOs reported hundreds of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, the most recent year for which figures were available. Most consisted of verbal or written harassment or insults, threats, or vandalism, and several involved violence. An EU survey found 30 percent of Muslims in the country said they had experienced religious discrimination during the previous five years, and that Muslims' feeling of attachment to the country was the second lowest among 15 European countries surveyed. Groups regularly staged protests against Islamic institutions, and internet sites described Muslims as threats. Police registered 26 incidents of anti-Semitic chants at soccer matches in 2016, and CIDI reported use of "Jew" as a term of insult was common. There were incidents of vandalism during the year against Jewish and Muslim targets. CIDI reported 21 incidents of vandalism against Jewish sites in 2016; a report by an Amsterdam academic cited 72 attacks or threats against mosques in the same year.

There were reports of violence, threats, discrimination, verbal abuse, and vandalism against Muslims and Jews. Agencies collecting data on such incidents stated many occurrences went unreported. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The police registered 352 incidents, including harassment, verbal abuse, and vandalism against Muslims in 2016, compared with 439 in the previous year. Antidiscrimination boards registered 250 incidents in 2016, 10 more than in 2015. The Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the Internet (MDI), an NGO, and the government's internet discrimination hotline (MIND) cumulatively registered 251 inflammatory statements against Muslims in 2016, compared with 472 in 2015.

The police registered 335 anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, compared with 428 incidents in 2015. Of these, 198 incidents concerned verbal harassment or insults. Many involved use of the epithet "Jew," as a general insult.

CIDI reported 109 anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, compared with 126 in the previous year. According to CIDI, persons who were recognizable as Jewish because of dress or outward appearance, for instance wearing a yarmulke, were sometimes targets of direct confrontations. Incidents included three physical assaults in 2016. In one incident, a janitor of Moroccan origin got into a fight with a colleague, deriding his Jewish origin. CIDI registered fewer incidents (10) of bullying and verbal harassment of Jewish students because of their religion in and around schools, but an increase in total cases of verbal abuse incidents (25) and incidents in public and traditional media (four). CIDI registered fewer hate emails (seven), which it said some analysts attributed, not to a decline in hate speech on the internet, but to a shift towards more hate speech on social media. There were 21 incidents of vandalism, according to CIDI.

The NIHR reported receiving 24 complaints in 2016 about religious discrimination in the workplace.

In June the nonprofit Verwey Jonker Institute published the results of its government-commissioned research into which factors determine positive or negative perceptions of Muslims. The goal of the research was to help authorities determine how to design policies to redress anti-Muslim discrimination. The institute surveyed 3,790 youths aged 12-23 and 2,020 older adults. It found more negative views of Muslims among boys and young men (33 percent) than among girls and young women (15 percent). The most negative views of Muslims were among less-educated male youths (35 percent), many of whom had little to no contact with Muslims, often basing their opinions on media reports of Muslim crimes and Muslim cultural views towards women and others. According to the institute, these youths often viewed Muslims as a threat to national culture or the economy, and/or feared Muslims wanted to rule the country. Most of these youths, however, disapproved of physical actions against Muslims.

A September 21 survey by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights reported 72 percent of the nation's Muslims believed religious or ethnic discrimination was widespread in the country. Thirty percent of Muslims stated they had experienced discrimination because of their religion over the previous five years. Muslims' feeling of attachment to the country (3.4 on a five-point scale) was the second lowest of the 15 EU countries surveyed. Research by the SCP from December 2016 found 60 percent of ethnic Turks and Moroccans, the two largest ethnic minorities, reported feeling connected with the country. Among ethnic Turkish

and Moroccan youths, the percentage was significantly lower, with only 44 percent and 52 percent, respectively, reporting feeling connected with the country.

The PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) and Identitair Verzet (Identity Resistance) movements regularly staged protests against Islamic institutions. For example, on September 4, two activists displayed a banner in front of a new secondary Islamic school in Amsterdam saying, “those who sow Islam harvest the Sharia,” and on September 2, activists displayed banners at a building site of a new mosque in Venlo with texts such as “No mosque in our neighborhood” and “No Jihad in our street.” On September 1, six PEGIDA members protested the installation of a Muslim mayor in the town of Arnhem, stating they feared it would result in the Islamization of the provincial capital.

On January 12, the Amsterdam District Court convicted four men for offending and discriminating against Jews. They had participated in a 2016 demonstration in Amsterdam organized by the Netherlands People’s Party, carrying neo-Nazi banners and wearing anti-Semitic nose stickers. The court fined them 600 to 800 euros (\$720 to \$960) and sentenced them to 40-60 hours of community service.

CIDI called for more specific measures to stop anti-Semitic chanting during soccer matches. In 2016, the police registered 26 such incidents in and around the soccer field.

CIDI also expressed concern about the use of “Jew” as a general term of insult in the public sphere. For example, individuals often called police officers, in particular, “Jew.”

MDI reported 64 instances of anti-Semitic language on the internet in 2016 (7 percent of the total number of incidents of intolerance on the internet), compared with 46 incidents in 2015 (also 7 percent of the total.) MDI concluded two thirds of the expressions were not punishable under the law.

On August 24, The Hague District Court ruled that the suspension of a civil servant, Yasmina Haifi, at the Ministry of Justice and Security in 2014 for tweeting “ISIS is a premeditated plan by Zionists” was too severe a punishment, as the employee was exercising her right to free speech. The court decreed a written reprimand would have sufficed. Haifi remained employed at the Ministry of Justice in a different capacity.

Internet blogs *PowNed News* and *GeenStijl* conducted discussions on the role of Muslims and Islam in society, in which the sites described Muslims as cultural and political threats as well as sources of hatred.

In late April MIND received several complaints that the *Altrechts.com* website published a list of alleged “public enemies,” including citizens with a migrant background, and “Dutch Jews,” who were described as “alien organisms.” CIDI filed a complaint with police and demanded the list be removed as soon as possible. The internet service provider took the website offline, and police initiated an investigation. A government spokesperson said, “The cabinet regards the list’s publication as repugnant.”

Organizers disinvited hip-hop group *Broederliefde* from performing at the May 5 Liberation Day festival because a video surfaced in which a member of the group, rapper Emms, shouted anti-Semitic slogans such as “*Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas,*” during a soccer match.

In April city workers in Amsterdam removed and relocated a small plaque placed near the entrance to a residential house commemorating a Holocaust victim who had lived there. A couple living in the house sued the city to have the plaque removed altogether, saying it placed an emotional burden on them and attracted visitors, compromising their right to privacy. After public protests, the couple dropped their suit. They said the plaque reminded them too much of their deceased child, but they valued the memory of all Holocaust victims.

On December 9, police arrested a former asylum seeker, waving a Palestinian flag and a piece of wood, after he smashed several windows of a kosher restaurant in Amsterdam. In response, parliamentarians from the Liberal and Christina Union parties dined at the restaurant in a show of support.

On Liberation Day, May 5, the apartment of a Jewish woman in Apeldoorn was vandalized when the Star of David and the word “whore” were scratched on her front door.

On February 20, individuals defaced a mosque in the town of Waalwijk with obscene graffiti. Around the same time, several mosques received threatening letters with swastikas and calling Islam “a false and devilish religion.”

CIDI reported 21 incidents of vandalism in 2016. Incidents included destruction of property, such as a mezuzah, or the writing of anti-Semitic graffiti on walls, such

as “Jew=Israel=Nazi,” on May 7 in Bilthoven; “ Hamas, all Jews to the gas,” on May 25 in a village in North Holland Province; and “Jews should burn,” on March 25 in The Hague.

In March Ineke van der Valk, a University of Amsterdam professor, published *The Third Monitor on Muslim Discrimination*, which included a survey of threats, vandalism, and other acts against mosques. The report cited 72 incidents in 2016, the highest number since it began monitoring in 2005.

In Amsterdam, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian groups and a number of NGOs, including the Council of Churches, Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation, and Humanist Alliance, established the Security Pact Against Discrimination, an organization to combat anti-Muslim and other forms of discrimination.

On March 4, approximately 300 Muslims and non-Muslims gathered at the Al Kabir Mosque in Amsterdam to show support for Muslims and to counter “hateful stories” about Muslims. “Politicians, stop saying that the Netherlands is threatened by Islam,” said Adbou Menebhi of the NGO Collective against Islamophobia.

CIDI continued to conduct programs to counter prejudice against Jews and other minorities in schools. CIDI again invited 25 teachers to visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem for a seminar on how to teach students about the Holocaust, especially in the face of prejudices by students toward the Jewish community. CIDI also led workshops for police and prosecutors at the police academy to help them recognize anti-Semitism.

The Liberal Jewish Community of Amsterdam continued with its program of reaching out to youth in the “Get to Know Your Neighbors” project, which invited students into its synagogue to introduce them to a temple and explain Jewish practices.

Multiple groups continued with existing initiatives to bring Muslims and Jews together. For example, the Salaam-Shalom NGO in Amsterdam through its “Mo&Moos” (Mohammed and Moshe) program and SPIOR (the umbrella organization of Islamic organizations in the Rotterdam region), in Rotterdam again brought together young Muslim and Jewish professionals to encourage leadership on interfaith issues. The NGO INS Platform continued to operate a website where citizens could meet “ordinary” Muslims in an effort to overcome prejudice. In Amstelveen, the Jewish-Muslim Alliance Amstelland (a collaboration between Jewish and Muslim groups and local authorities to advance understanding between

Jews and Muslims), Mo&Moos, the Jewish group Bendigamos, and local political parties organized meetings to discuss safety, discrimination against Jews and Muslims, religion, and education.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. embassy emphasized in conversations with government officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, Justice and Security, and Social Affairs, the national police, and parliamentarians the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and discussed how the country safeguarded religious freedom. The embassy also raised these issues with local and municipal leaders, including the mayor of Rotterdam and members of the Amsterdam City Council.

The embassy and the consulate general in Amsterdam highlighted the need for religious tolerance and interfaith understanding and discussed issues of religious integration and violent extremism in outreach to youth, academics, and religious leaders from the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faiths and community organizations such as CIDI, SPIOR, Humanity in Action, and the Anne Frank Foundation.

For National Religious Freedom Day on January 16, the embassy organized an interfaith dinner with 16 guests from the Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Bahai communities to discuss religious freedom in the country. Guests praised the country as a historically tolerant society that had welcomed various faiths for centuries, but they noted an undercurrent of prejudice and discrimination in an increasingly secular society. Also in January the Consul General in Amsterdam hosted a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration, where guests, including individuals from various backgrounds and faiths, discussed integration, religious tolerance, and countering discrimination. The Consul General hosted the mayor of a city in the U.S. south to discuss violent extremism and religious tolerance with Muslim and Jewish community leaders from Amsterdam.

Representatives from the embassy and consulate general met with a wide range of religious leaders, including the Liberal Jewish, Orthodox Jewish, Christian, Bahai, evangelical Christian, and Muslim communities throughout the year to highlight U.S. support for religious freedom. They attended iftars and a seder organized by the Liberal Jewish Community. Discussions at the iftars and seder involved Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders on their perceptions of religious freedom in the country. Refugees also attended these events and participated in discussions on integration and religious tolerance. The embassy met with religious leaders at

mosques in Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam and discussed the freedom to practice religion, religious tolerance, and diversity in the country. The embassy toured the Orthodox synagogue of The Hague and its neighboring school to discuss ways the embassy and the synagogue could cooperate to promote religious tolerance. Embassy officials visited several Christian and evangelical churches whose congregants came from a refugee background to discuss issues pertaining to integration and religious freedom.