

# **LUXEMBOURG 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, including the right to practice it in public and manifest religious opinions, and prohibits compulsory participation in religious services or observance of religious groups' days of rest. Parliament adopted legislation banning all forms of face coverings, including the burqa, in public buildings and on public transportation; legislation formalizing the dissolution of local Roman Catholic Church councils and the transfer of their assets to municipalities or to a fund of the Catholic Archdiocese of Luxembourg, despite continuing opposition by the councils; and an animal protection law requiring stunning before slaughter except in cases of hunting and fishing. Members of the Jewish and Muslim communities said the law requiring stunning of animals prior to slaughter conflicted with the expression of their religious beliefs.

The Council of Religious Groups that Signed an Agreement with the State (Conseil des Cultes Conventionnes – CCC), an interfaith council of six religious groups met four times during the year. The Luxembourg School of Religion and Society (LSRS), a Catholic institution of higher education and research, hosted several conferences and expositions on religious freedom.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom issues with government officials at the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, and State, as well as with leaders and representatives of religious groups, including reactions to the implementation of the laws banning facial coverings and regulating animal slaughter and to the implementation of the law reorganizing the relationship between religious groups and the state. In November the Ambassador hosted an interfaith Thanksgiving lunch at which he delivered remarks supporting religious freedom and condemning anti-Semitism.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 606,000 (July 2018 estimate). By law, the government may not collect personal information related to religion and relies on religious groups to report the number of their adherents. Approximately 70 percent of the population is Roman Catholic; there are approximately 10,000 Protestants, 10,000 Muslims (including those from

neighboring countries who cross the border to worship in the country and recently arrived asylum seekers), 3,000 members of Orthodox churches, 2,500 Anglicans, and 1,500 Jews. According to a 2011 study, groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and atheists.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice religion in public and manifest religious opinions, as long as no crime is committed in exercising that freedom. While the constitution guarantees the right to assemble peacefully without prior authorization, it stipulates that open-air religious or other meetings are subject to regulation by police. The constitution prohibits compulsory participation in or attendance at church services or observance of religious days of rest and stipulates that a civil marriage ceremony must precede a religious marriage ceremony for the state to recognize it. The constitution provides for the regulation of relations between religious groups and the state, including the role of the state in appointing and dismissing religious clergy and the publication of documents by religious groups, through conventions between the state and individual religious groups. These conventions are subject to parliamentary review.

The government has formally approved conventions with six religious groups, which it supports financially based on the number of adherents of each group. The six groups are the Catholic Church, Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Serbian Orthodox Churches as one community, Anglican Church, Reformed Protestant Church of Luxembourg and Protestant Church of Luxembourg as one community, Jewish community, and Muslim community. To qualify for a convention with the state, a religious community must be a recognized world religion and establish an official and stable representative body with which the government can interact. Groups without signed conventions, such as the Baha'i Faith, operate freely but do not receive state funding.

The government funding levels for the six religious groups are specified in each convention: 6.75 million euros (\$7.74 million) to the Catholic community; 315,000 euros (\$361,000) to the Jewish community; 285,000 euros (\$327,000) to the Orthodox community; 450,000 euros (\$516,000) to the Protestant community;

450,000 euros (\$516,000) to the Muslim community; and 125,000 euros (\$143,000) to the Anglican community. Under the law, newly hired religious workers do not receive government-funded salaries and pensions, but clergy of recognized religious groups hired in 2016 or earlier continue to receive their salaries from the government and are grandfathered into the government-funded pension system.

Under the conventions, government funding to a religious community may be cancelled if the government determines the religious community is not upholding any of the three mutually agreed principles: respect for human rights, national law, and public order.

On April 26, parliament enacted a law prohibiting covering of the face in certain specific areas, such as official buildings or on public transportation. The law permits individuals to wear face coverings on the street. The prohibition applies to all forms of face coverings, including, but not limited to, full-body veils. Violators are subject to a fine of between 25 and 250 euros (\$29 to \$290).

Pursuant to an agreement between the government and the Catholic Archdiocese of Luxembourg, parliament adopted a bill on January 17 that dissolved 285 local Catholic Church councils and transferred the assets they had been managing to a common Catholic Church fund under the guardianship of the archdiocese. The bill included an inventory listing 493 religious buildings as belonging to either the fund or a municipality. A third category enumerated those religious buildings that municipalities could not decommission without the archdiocese's prior consent.

On June 27, parliament passed a law requiring the stunning of animals before slaughter, with exceptions for hunting and fishing. Violators are subject to a fine of between 251 and 200,000 euros (\$290 to \$229,000) and possible imprisonment between eight days and three years. The law does not prohibit the sale or importation of halal or kosher meat.

According to law, public schools may not teach religion classes, but students are required to take an ethics course called Life and Society. The ethics course covers religion, primarily from a historical perspective.

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

## **Government Practices**

According to police, no individual had violated the new law banning facial coverings in certain public places since its introduction.

On July 11, the Luxembourg Administrative Court dismissed a lawsuit filed in 2016 by the Syndicate of Church Councils, an association representing the interests of 270 of the 285 local Catholic Church councils, and 109 church councils against the government and Catholic Archbishop of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Hollerich. The suit had sought to invalidate the agreement between the government and the archdiocese on the disposition of Catholic Church property managed by the local Church councils. The court ruled that the Church councils did not own the properties in question and therefore could not argue they had been expropriated. Forty-seven Church councils filed a separate lawsuit on the same topic in April at the Luxembourg district court for damages; the case was pending at year's end.

The Jewish Consistory – an umbrella organization concerned with Jewish life in the country that acts as the main interlocutor for the Jewish community with the government and other religious communities – and members of the Muslim community said the new law requiring the stunning of animals prior to killing them affected the religious freedom of Jews and Muslims, as it had an impact on ritual slaughter consistent with their religious beliefs. According to the consistory, although the law made ritual slaughter illegal, in practice, the Jewish and Muslim communities were not affected, as they had already been importing meat for their consumption from abroad since there had been no halal or kosher slaughterhouses in the country prior to enactment of the law.

In September the pastor of the Protestant Trinity Church in Luxembourg City reiterated that the mounting costs for an ongoing civil court case could potentially bankrupt his church. The pastor stated the judge should have dismissed the case because it pertained to an internal church matter.

In June the government signed an agreement with the Major Seminary (Grand Seminaire), a legal entity that trains Catholic priests, through which the government committed to providing 615,000 euros per year (\$705,000) between 2018 and 2021 to the LSRS to promote, among other objectives, research, education, and collaboration with religious groups that have signed agreements with the state. The Major Seminary founded the LSRS in 2015 to foster relations between religious communities in the country, with a particular focus on CCC members.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government granted refugee status to 978 individuals during the year, the majority of whom were Muslim. The Organization for Welcome and Integration, an entity of the Ministry of Family and Integration, stated the government sought to be proactive in assuring refugee access to mosques, halal meals, and same-sex housing for those who requested it.

On June 17, the government inaugurated a monument honoring the country's Holocaust victims. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Prime Minister Xavier Bettel underscored the persecution of Jews during World War II. The Jewish Consistory welcomed the government's action, describing it as an important step to combat recurring anti-Semitism.

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

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

In contrast with the previous year, when it did not meet, the CCC met four times during the year, but did not disclose information about its deliberations. Archbishop Hollerich and Grand Rabbi Alain David Nacache continued to serve as president and vice president, respectively. The New Apostolic Church and the Baha'i Faith, which did not sign conventions with the government, continued to participate in council meetings, as they had since its foundation in 2013, as permanently invited members without voting rights.

The LSRS hosted several conferences and expositions throughout the year. On October 25, the LSRS hosted a conference on "Religious Freedom: Chance for the Individual and Challenge for the Religious Community." The LSRS headquarters, located in the same building housing the Major Seminary, served as meeting place for the CCC.

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

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom issues with government officials at the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs. In September embassy officials met with the Ministry of State under Prime Minister and Minister for Religious Affairs Bettel to discuss religious freedom in the country, including government efforts to promote religious freedom, its interaction with the CCC and

religious communities, as well as concerns of religious communities about issues such as ritual slaughter.

In November the Ambassador hosted an interfaith Thanksgiving lunch discussion. Guests representing eight religious groups, as well as the officer responsible for religious affairs in the Ministry of State, joined embassy officials to discuss religious tolerance in society. The Ambassador gave informal remarks advocating tolerance and interfaith dialogue and condemning anti-Semitism.

Embassy officials met with leaders and representatives of religious groups, including the Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Baha'i communities and the nonbeliever association. Topics included reactions to the implementation of the new laws banning facial coverings and regulating animal slaughter and to the implementation of the law that reorganized the relationship between religious groups and the state.

In September an embassy representative met with the pastor of Trinity Church to hear his concerns about the civil court case the pastor believed represented discrimination against his church.