

# FRANCE 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution and the law protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice religion. On October 2, President Emmanuel Macron unveiled a broad set of policies to combat “Islamist separatism,” which he described as a “methodical organization” to create a “countersociety” in which Islamists impose their own rules and laws on isolated communities, and defend state secularism against radical Islam. Among the measures in a draft law to be taken up by parliament, which Macron said were directed against radical Islamists that undermined French values rather than at Muslims broadly, were ending foreign financing of imams and abolishing unaccredited schools. On November 2, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin announced the government had closed 43 mosques for extremism since May 2017. Catholic Church officials criticized government COVID-19 restrictions that, they said, inordinately affected religious groups. In May, the country’s highest administrative court ordered an end to the ban on religious gatherings, calling freedom of worship a fundamental right. In November, the same court denied an appeal by Catholic bishops to overturn a new government prohibition on masses after a new wave of COVID infections. In June, the Constitutional Council invalidated core provisions of a law against online hate speech that parliament had enacted in May as part of the government’s plan to combat racism and anti-Semitism. In June, the European Court of Human Rights ruled the government had violated the free speech rights of Palestinian activists advocating for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. In January, demonstrators in Paris protested a 2019 court ruling that the killer of a Jewish woman, Sarah Halimi, in 2017 was not criminally responsible. Jewish groups protested the Paris prosecutor’s decision not to charge a man with anti-Semitism after he painted swastikas on a landmark Paris street. President Macron and other government officials condemned anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian acts, and the government continued to deploy security forces to protect religious and other sensitive sites.

There were instances of religiously motivated crimes and other abuses, including killings, attempted killings, assaults, threats, hate speech, discrimination, and vandalism. On October 29, a Tunisian man killed three Christian worshippers in a church in Nice. In October, a teenage Chechen Muslim refugee beheaded teacher Samuel Paty after he showed his class cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a discussion on freedom of expression. In September, a Pakistani man stabbed two persons outside the former offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, shortly after the

magazine had republished cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Although 2020 statistics on anti-Christian incidents were not yet available, most incidents involved vandalism or arson of churches and cemeteries. The French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) reported 235 incidents targeting Muslims, compared with 154 in 2019. The Jewish Community Protection Service (SPCJ) reported 339 anti-Semitic incidents – a decrease of 50 percent compared with the 687 in 2019 – including a violent assault on a Jewish man and desecration of Jewish cemeteries. In October, authorities charged two women with assault and racist slurs for stabbing two women wearing Islamic headscarves. A January survey for the American Jewish Committee (AJC) found 70 percent of Jewish respondents said they had been the targets of at least one anti-Semitic incident in their lifetimes. In the same survey, 47 percent of Jewish and non-Jewish respondents (and two-thirds of Jews) said the level of anti-Semitism in the country was high.

The U.S. embassy, consulates general, and American presence posts (APPs) discussed religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in combating violent extremism, and cooperation on these issues with officials at the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the Interministerial Delegation to Fight Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hate (DILCRAH). The Ambassador designated combating anti-Semitism as one of four key “pillars” of enhanced embassy outreach. The Ambassador and embassy, consulate, and APP officials met regularly with religious communities and their leaders throughout the country to discuss religious freedom concerns and encourage interfaith cooperation and tolerance. The embassy sponsored projects and events to combat religious discrimination and religiously motivated hate crimes, such as projects bringing together youth of different faiths and roundtable events with religious leaders, and regularly used social media to convey messages highlighting issues pertaining to religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 67.8 million (midyear 2020 estimate).

Because the government does not collect religious or ethnic data on the population, there is no official count of the numbers of persons belonging to different religious groups. A report released in January by the Observatory for Secularism, a government-appointed commission, based on a poll conducted in cooperation with polling company Viavoice, presented estimated figures of persons who identify as part of a religion or feel tied to a religion. According to the report, whose figures

are consistent with other estimates, 47 percent of respondents identify as Catholic, 3 percent Muslim, 3 percent Protestant, 2 percent Buddhist, 1 percent Jewish, 1 percent Christian Orthodox, and 1 percent other religious groups; 34 percent said they have no religious affiliation and 8 percent preferred not to respond. The observatory's 2019 report estimated there are 140-150 thousand Jehovah's Witnesses and 150-300 thousand Hindus. In a separate question about religious belief, 35 percent said they are believers, 29 percent nonbelievers or atheist, 17 percent agnostic, and 12 percent indifferent. Most observers, including the observatory in its 2019 report, estimate the number of Muslims in the country at three to five million.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution defines the country as a secular republic and states it "shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law," regardless of religion, and shall respect all beliefs. The law provides for the separation of religion and state and guarantees the free exercise of religious worship except to maintain public order.

The law, as well as international and European covenants to which the country adheres, protects the freedom of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Interference with freedom of religion is subject to criminal penalties, including a fine of 1,500 euros (\$1,800) and imprisonment for one month. Individuals who are defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of any law they say impedes their freedom of religion.

Laws increase the penalties for acts of violence or defamation when they are committed because of the victim's actual or perceived membership or nonmembership in a given religious group. Additional penalties beyond those for the underlying crime for acts of violence that courts determine are religiously motivated are three to five years' imprisonment and fines of 45,000 to 75,000 euros (\$55,200-\$92,000), depending on the severity of the victims' injuries. For religiously motivated acts of public defamation, defined as an allegation of fact that affects the honor of a person or body, the penalties are one year's imprisonment and/or a fine of 45,000 euros (\$55,200). The government may expel noncitizens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons based on religion.

Although the law does not require it, religious groups may apply for official recognition and tax-exempt status. Religious groups may register under two categories: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes; and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organize only religious activities. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in for-profit as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both categories. For example, Catholics perform religious activities through their associations of worship and operate schools through their cultural associations.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture (the administrative body representing the central government in each department) for recognition as an association of worship and tax-exempt status. In order to qualify as an association of worship, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include liturgical services and practices, religious training, and the construction of buildings serving the religious group. The association must also engage in public worship and respect public order. Among excluded activities are those that are purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. To apply for tax-exempt status, the association must provide to the prefecture its estimated budget for the year, annual accounts for the previous three years or since the association's creation, whichever is shorter, a written justification of eligibility for the status, and the number of members of the association. In Paris, the association must have a minimum of 25 members. Once granted, the association may use the tax-exempt status nationwide. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in conformity with its tax-exempt status, however, the government may change that status and require the association to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to the Ministry of Interior, 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witness, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status. The number of cultural associations, many of which are not associated with religious groups, is in the thousands and changes frequently. Cultural associations may be declared using an online form through the government's public administration website. Cultural associations, even if associated with religious groups, may operate without applying for government recognition. Under the law, the Church of Scientology has the status of a secular and not a religious association. Parliamentary reports (most recently in 1996) have labelled Scientology as a "cult," and multiple Scientology officials have been convicted of crimes in the country.

The law states, “Detained persons have the right to freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion. They may practice the religion of their choice...without other limits than those imposed by the security needs and good order of the institution.”

Counterterrorism legislation grants prefects in each department the authority to close a place of worship for a maximum of six months if they find that comments, writings, or activities in the place of worship “provoke violence, hatred or discrimination or the commission of acts of terrorism or praise such acts of terrorism.” The management of the place of worship has 48 hours to appeal the closure decision to an administrative court. A place of worship that has been closed may remain closed beyond the six-month maximum if it does not replace its chief cleric and/or management. Noncompliance with a closure decision carries a six-month prison sentence and a fine of 7,500 euros (\$9,200). On December 17, parliament voted for the extension of the legislation until the end of July 2021.

The law prohibits covering one’s face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces, such as restaurants and movie theaters. If police encounter a person in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they are legally required to ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual’s identity. According to the law, police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. Police may not question or hold an individual for more than four hours. Refusing a police instruction to remove a face-covering garment carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$180) or attendance at a citizenship course. Individuals who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority are subject to a fine of up to 30,000 euros (\$36,800) and may receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the person coerced is a minor.

The law prohibits agents of the administration, public services, and companies or associations carrying out public services from demonstrating their religion through visible signs of religious affiliation, such as the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, or Christian cross. The prohibition applies during working hours and at the place of employment.

By law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new places of worship. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or

lease property to groups at advantageous rates. The law also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The state owns and is responsible for the upkeep of most places of worship, primarily Catholic, built before 1905. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

The law separating religion and state does not apply in three classes of territories. Because Alsace-Lorraine (currently comprising the departments of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and la Moselle and known as Alsace-Moselle) was part of Germany when the law was enacted, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Pastors, priests, and rabbis of these four recognized faiths in Alsace-Moselle receive a salary from the Interior Ministry, and the country's President, with the agreement of the Holy See, appoints the Catholic bishops of Metz and Strasbourg. The Prime Minister appoints the Chief Rabbi and the presidents of the Jewish and Protestant consistories (the administrative governance bodies of these groups) in Alsace-Moselle, and the Interior Minister appoints ministers of the three Christian churches (Catholic, Lutheran, and Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine) in the region. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. The Overseas Department of French Guiana, which is governed under 19th century colonial laws, may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Other overseas departments and overseas territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This provision also applies to the portion of Antarctica the government claims as an overseas territory.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees from wearing visible signs of religious affiliation and students from wearing "conspicuous religious symbols," including the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Public schools do not provide religious instruction except in Alsace-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. In Alsace-Moselle, religious education regarding one of the four recognized faiths (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine, and Judaism) is compulsory in public primary and secondary schools, although students may opt for a secular equivalent with a written request from their parents. Religious education classes are taught by laypersons who are trained and nominated by the respective religious groups but are paid by the state. Elsewhere in the country, public schools teach information about religious groups as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear conspicuous religious symbols or to receive religious instruction may homeschool or send their

children to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools.

By law, the government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. In 98 percent of private schools, in accordance with the law, the government pays the teachers' salaries, provided the school accepts all children regardless of their religious affiliation. The law does not address the issue of religious instruction in government-subsidized private schools. According to the education code, religious instruction is allowed but optional in government-subsidized private schools. Students are not required to attend religion classes, and other activities are available for students who opt out.

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

The law criminalizes the BDS movement against Israel, treating it as “a provocation to discrimination or hatred or violence towards a person or a group of persons because of their origin or belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race, or a determined religion.”

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

### **Government Practices**

During his October 29 emergency visit to Nice, shortly after a Tunisian national entered the Basilica of Notre Dame and stabbed three Catholic worshippers to death, President Macron offered his condolences to the country's Catholics and urged people of all religions to unite and not “give in to the spirit of division.” In a November 7 national memorial, Prime Minister Jean Castex paid tribute to the three victims. Castex said, “We know the enemy. Not only is he identified, but he has a name: It is radical Islamism, a political ideology that disfigures the Muslim religion by distorting its texts, its dogma, and its commands.” He concluded, “We will not allow the France that we love to be disfigured.”

On October 19, Interior Minister Darmanin ordered a six-month closure of the mosque in Pantin, a suburb of Paris, following the October 16 beheading of teacher

Samuel Paty, who had shown his class cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad as part of a lesson on freedom of expression. The mosque's imam had posted on social media calls to retaliate against Paty for showing the cartoons. The mosque appealed the Minister's decision before the Montreuil administrative court, which on October 27, validated the government's decision to close the mosque. The court ruled authorities had committed no "serious and manifestly illegal violation of fundamental freedoms" in temporarily closing the mosque "for the sole purpose of preventing acts of terrorism."

On August 30, Junior Minister for Citizenship Marlene Schiappa reported that since February 2018, when it launched a nationwide program to counter "Islamism and communitarianism," the Ministry of Interior had closed 210 restaurants and cafes (mostly kebab restaurants), 15 places of worship, 12 cultural establishments, and four schools. According to Schiappa, those establishments, which the government did not specifically identify, "were gathering places to organize Islamist separatism." Independent online investigative website Mediapart requested the list of closed sites through the Administrative Documents Access Commission (*Commission d'accès aux documents administratifs*, CADA), an independent government agency providing administrative documents and public records. In December, CADA upheld the Ministry of Interior's decision not to make public specific names of institutions.

On November 2, Interior Minister Darmanin announced at the National Assembly that the government had closed 43 mosques since May 2017. The Ministry of the Interior reported that, as of December 29, it was in the process of investigating for closure 76 mosques, including 16 in the Paris region, because of suspected separatism. The al-Kawthar Mosque in Grenoble reopened in August 2019 after the legal maximum closure period of six months.

On February 18, President Macron, together with his Ministers of Interior, Housing, Youth, and Sports, visited the eastern city of Mulhouse to introduce a plan, which would require parliamentary approval, to fight "Islamist separatism." Macron said "political Islam" had no place in the country and stressed national unity. He proposed specific measures, including an end to the practice of foreign-financed imams, referring to the 300 imams whom foreign governments had sent to the country, adding they would be replaced by French-trained imams. According to Macron, the strategy aimed to reduce Islamist influence in sensitive neighborhoods and to abolish structures, such as unaccredited schools that paralleled or replaced government structures and undermined state secularism. In public schools, Macron proposed abolishing foreign language and culture

programs taught by individuals appointed and/or funded by foreign governments. Macron also announced the reinforcement of oversight of foreign-funded religious sites.

Further to his February announcement, on October 2, President Macron introduced the outlines of a draft law that he said aimed to counter “Islamist separatism.” The government introduced the full draft law in December, and parliament was scheduled to consider it in 2021. Macron reaffirmed state secularism, calling it “the cement of a united France,” and said, “What we must attack is Islamist separatism.” Macron stated that all religious practice must comport with the law. He said, “Islam is a religion ... that is being infected by radical impulses,” adding, “External influences ... have pushed these most radical forms,” citing their effect on Wahabism, Salfafism, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Macron described Islamic separatism as a project “...serving as a pretext for teaching principles which are not in accordance with the Republic’s laws,” in which Islamists impose their own rules and laws on isolated communities and negate national “principles, gender equality, and human dignity.” Macron stated his campaign targeted radical Islamists and not Islam or Muslims and that he offered an “inclusive message” to millions of Muslims who were integrated “full citizens.” He added, “Our challenge today is to fight against this abuse that some perpetrate in the name of religion, by ensuring that those who want to believe in Islam are not targeted.”

Prior to this speech, President Macron, Prime Minister Castex, and Interior Minister Darmanin held consultations with the CFCM on September 16, 25, and 26 to present the government’s plan. The CFCM stated it was in agreement with the President’s measures.

Jehovah’s Witness officials reported one case in which authorities interfered with proselytizing during the year. On February 8, municipal police in Erstein, Bas-Rhin Department, citing a municipal decree, prohibited Jehovah’s Witnesses from engaging in door-to-door activity. Jehovah’s Witnesses sent a letter to the mayor, referencing the laws recognizing their right to proselytize, but did not indicate they received a response.

Between March 16 and May 11, the government implemented a nationwide lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic that included a ban on religious gatherings and worship and door-to-door proselytizing. While the government lifted restrictions on freedom of movement on May 11, it extended the ban on gatherings in places of worship – except for funerals which it limited to 20 persons

– and gatherings with more than 10 persons until June 2. The Catholic Church was the most vocal in expressing opposition to these measures.

On April 28, after then-Prime Minister Edouard Philippe told the National Assembly religious services would not resume before June 2 (although churches remained open for individual prayer), the Bishop’s Council of the Catholic Church responded that the continuing measures did not incorporate its proposal to resume religious services with social distancing measures in place. On April 30, then-Interior Minister Christophe Castaner met with Archbishop Eric de Moulins Beaufort, president of the Conference of Bishops of France, to discuss Catholic concern. Bishop of Nanterre Matthieu Rouge publicly criticized the government’s restrictions, which he said fell disproportionately on religious groups, stating that many shops and some museums were allowed to reopen on May 11. He called the delay for churches a sign of “anti-clericalism” or “anti-Catholic orientation” in the presidency. While expressing disappointment with the restrictions, Archbishop de Moulins Beaufort said Catholic officials would “adapt.”

In a May 18 ruling, the Council of State – the country’s highest administrative court – ordered the government to lift within eight days the ban on religious meetings, calling it a “disproportionate measure.” The council, responding to a lawsuit brought by NGOs and individuals, said such a ban on freedom of worship caused “serious and manifestly illegal damage.” The council highlighted that the government had previously authorized public gatherings of up to 10 persons in other settings and that a complete and total ban on worship was “disproportionate to the objective of preserving public health.” The ruling stipulated freedom of worship was a fundamental right that “includes among its essential components the right to participate collectively in ceremonies, in particular in places of worship,” and that the government’s decree “constitutes a serious and manifestly unlawful interference with it.” On May 23, the government issued a decree allowing services to resume.

On April 21, President Macron held a virtual meeting with religious leaders to thank them for implementing COVID-19 safety measures and celebrating religious holidays, including Easter, Passover, and Ramadan, “without gatherings” and to express the need to continue the collaboration.

On April 19, armed police interrupted a Mass at Saint-Andre de l’Europe, a Catholic church in Paris, to enforce social distancing. The police did not fine the priest or others involved with having the Mass go forward. The Mass had been scheduled to be broadcast later that weekend. Paris Archbishop Michel Aupetit

said police entered the church armed, an act he described as generally not permissible unless there was a threat to public order. He compared the COVID-19 climate to the World War II occupation of France.

Police fined the priest of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, a church under the authority of the Society of St. Pius X, 135 euros (\$170) for conducting an Easter Vigil Mass with approximately 40 attendees.

On October 30, authorities reintroduced measures restricting freedom of movement, religion, and worship to combat a second wave of COVID-19 infections. Places of worship remained open for individual prayer during the second nationwide lockdown, but authorities did not permit worship services, only authorizing funeral services attended by a maximum of 30 persons and weddings attended by a maximum of six persons. Five bishops announced on November 2 they had lodged appeals with the Council of State to demand the ban on masses be lifted, stating that the most recent COVID-19 restrictions violated freedom of worship and were disproportionate in relation to other COVID-19 lockdown measures. On November 7, the Council of State rejected the bishops' appeal. The ruling judge stated churches remained open, despite not being able to hold services, and that Catholics could go to a church near their homes, provided they carried the necessary paperwork. Priests were also allowed to visit persons in their homes, and chaplains to visit hospitals. The judge also stated current rules would be the subject of review by the government by November 16 to evaluate their pertinence and proportionality. On November 26, Prime Minister Castex announced only 30 persons at a time would be allowed at prayer services inside places of worship and with stringent sanitary measures.

In October, members of the Church of Scientology reported that the Court of Montreuil overturned the 2019 municipal decree by the mayor's office in Saint-Denis, just outside Paris, refusing a permit allowing the Church to renovate a building it had purchased in the municipality for the purpose of converting it into its headquarters and a training center. According to the Scientologists, the court found that "the mayor had exercised his powers for a purpose other than the preservation of the safety and accessibility of the premises." The court ordered the government to pay the Church of Scientology damages (amount as-yet unspecified). The municipality of Saint-Denis announced its intention to appeal the decision, and the case was pending at year's end.

A May 10 article in *The Washington Post* reported that "many Muslims, religious freedom advocates, and scholars see a great deal of irony" that the French ban on

face coverings such as burqas remained in effect despite the country's adoption of mask requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the year, there were no reports of police enforcing the face covering ban or of protests or public comment concerning the ban by Muslim groups. French media rejected the premise of the article. Newspaper *Le Figaro*, for example, called it "a misunderstanding and a mistake," adding that the "antiburqa" ban did include exceptions for health, professional, or legislative requirements and that COVID-19 mask requirements were compatible with the law.

In a December 3 interview, Interior Minister Darmanin said the country had deported 66 radicalized foreign Islamists since the end of September. The 66 were part of a list of 231 foreigners on the FSPRT (*fichier des signalements pour la prevention de la radicalisation a caractere terroriste*) – a list of individuals suspected of radicalization – under orders of deportation. Darmanin also traveled in early November to Morocco, Italy, Tunisia, Malta, and Algeria to meet counterparts and discuss means to reinforce cooperation to fight terrorism and the return of their suspected radicalized nationals. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 300 imams, or 70 percent of all imams in the country, were trained in foreign countries such as Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria.

The government maintained the deployment of security forces throughout the country to protect sensitive sites, including vulnerable Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic sites and other places of worship. Following the October 29 terrorist attack at the Notre Dame Basilica in Nice, President Macron announced an increase, from 3,000 to 7,000 troops across the country, in domestic counterterrorism patrols under the Ministry of Defense's Operation Sentinel. On October 30, Defense Minister Florence Parly told the Defense Council the deployment would focus on protecting schools and places of worship.

On September 25, following a terrorist attack in which two persons were wounded in a stabbing near the former headquarters of satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, Interior Minister Darmanin announced the kosher supermarket that was targeted by a coordinated attack after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in January 2015 "will now be permanently guarded." Darmanin also announced he had ordered extra protection of Jewish sites for Yom Kippur. On September 27, Darmanin visited a synagogue in Boulogne-Billancourt, a western suburb of Paris. During the visit, he said, "Jews remain the target of Islamist attacks," adding that the government had mobilized more than 7,000 police and soldiers to protect Jewish places of worship on Yom Kippur.

On December 16, the Special Criminal Court delivered its verdict on the terrorism trial related to the January 2015 terrorist attacks, finding all 14 defendants guilty of providing support to the three deceased terrorists who carried out the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*, police in Montrouge, and a kosher supermarket. They received sentences ranging from four years to life in prison. The court dropped terror qualifications for six of the defendants, convicting them instead of providing material support without knowledge of the terrorist intent. Three of the defendants, including Hayat Boumeddiene (the wife of one of the shooters, Amedy Coulibaly) were tried in absentia. At least one defendant expressed his intent to appeal the court's decision.

On October 29, following investigative work by the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs and the Louvre and d'Orsay Museums, the government restituted to the heirs of Marguerite Stern seven paintings stolen by the Nazis in Paris during World War II.

At year's end, the Paris Appeals Court had not issued a ruling in the case of Lebanese-Canadian academic Hassan Diab, who was charged with bombing a synagogue in Paris during Sabbath prayers in 1980, killing four persons and injuring 40. In 2018, investigating magistrates dismissed the court case against Diab and ordered his release. Prosecutors appealed the case's dismissal, and the Paris Appeals Court requested additional expert testimony before ruling. Upon his release, Diab returned to Canada, where he remained at year's end.

In September, five years after the country issued international arrest warrants for four suspects believed to be involved in the 1982 terrorist attack against a Jewish restaurant in Paris that left six dead and wounded 22 others, Norwegian police arrested one suspect, naturalized Norwegian Walid Abdulrahman Abou Zayed. On November 27, the Norwegian Council of Ministers authorized Abou Zayed's extradition, and he was extradited to France on December 4.

On October 13, during a meeting with administrators of the guidelines in the country's schools and colleges, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer promised to support teachers, pupils, and parents who exposed breaches of the country's law on secularism in schools, including wearing religious symbols. His comments came after the Ministry of Education reported 935 infringements of the secularism law between September 2019 and March 2020. Middle schools for 11- to 15-year-olds accounted for 45 percent of incidents, while primary schools accounted for 37 percent. More than 40 percent of violations were in the form of

religiously motivated insults or other verbal aggression, while 15 percent involved the wearing of religious symbols, such as a crucifix, veil, or turban.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the penitentiary system employed Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Orthodox Christian, and Buddhist chaplains. In detainee visiting areas, visitors could bring religious objects to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues but could not pray. Prisoners could pray in their cells individually, with a chaplain in designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments where they could receive family for up to 48 hours.

The government continued to implement its 2018-20 national plan to combat racism and anti-Semitism, which had a strong focus on countering online hate content. The government said it would assess the results of the plan in 2021. On June 18, the Constitutional Council invalidated core provisions of a new law against online hate speech, adopted by parliament on May 13, that was part of the 2018-20 plan. The "Avia Law," introduced at the direction of then-Prime Minister Philippe, required online platforms to remove, within 24 hours, material they determined to be hateful content based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and religion; language trivializing genocide or crimes against humanity; and content deemed sexual harassment. Social media companies faced fines up to 1.25 million euros (\$1.53 million) if they failed to remove the content within the required timeframes. The Constitutional Council ruled these provisions of the law infringed on freedom of speech and were "not appropriate, necessary, and proportionate." Parliamentary committees were drafting replacement legislation at year's end.

On June 10, the European Court of Human Rights ruled the country had violated Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights when it convicted a group of 12 pro-Palestinian activists for incitement to economic discrimination. The group had distributed leaflets calling for a boycott of Israeli products as part of the BDS movement in 2009 and 2010. While France's highest court, the Court of Cassation, had upheld the conviction, the European court ruled the activists' actions were forms of political expression, protected by the human rights convention. In a final judgment on September 11, the court ordered the government to pay a total of 101,000 euros (\$124,000) in damages to the group. The government had three months to appeal the court's decision or make the payment but did not do either. At year's end, the fine remained unpaid.

On January 4, several thousand demonstrators gathered in Paris and a number of other cities to protest the December 2019 court ruling that deemed Kobili Traore “criminally not responsible” for Sarah Halimi’s killing in 2017 because he was under the influence of cannabis at the time of the attack. On January 23, during his visit to Israel, President Macron criticized the Paris Appeals Court ruling. In a January 27 statement, Chantal Arens, the senior judge of the Court of Cassation, and Prosecutor General Francois Molins responded to Macron, stating, “The independence of the justice system, of which the president of the Republic is the guarantor, is an essential factor in the functioning of a democracy.” At year’s end, Traore was held in a psychiatric hospital. The case was pending at the Court of Cassation.

On September 17, prosecutors opened an investigation into the song lyrics of Freeze Corleone, a rapper who was accused by several officials and organizations of promoting anti-Semitism. Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said Corleone was being investigated for “inciting racial hatred” based on the content of his songs and videos posted online. Frederic Potier, the interministerial delegate (head) of DILCRAH, had earlier reported the rapper to the public prosecutor’s office after identifying what he characterized as nine illegal passages in his music. In his lyrics, Corleone declared that he “arrives determined like Adolf in the 1930s,” that he does not “give a damn about the Shoah,” and that “like Swiss bankers, it will be all for the family so my children can live like Jewish rentiers.”

On July 28, police arrested Alain Bonnet, also known as Alain Soral, on charges of incitement of hatred against Jews and actions that “endanger the fundamental interests of the Republic” after comments he made on his website, Equality and Reconciliation. At the end of September, the Paris Appeals Court sentenced Soral to pay 134,400 euros (\$165,000) to the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) as punishment for releasing *Salvation Through The Jews*, a work by Leon Bloy (died 1917) that the court found to be anti-Semitic. On October 6, the court sentenced Soral to a 5,400 euro (\$6,600) fine for blaming Jews for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. Soral was convicted four times in 2019, following previous violations for Holocaust denial, anti-Semitic insults, and publishing an anti-Semitic video.

The Paris prosecutor’s October 14 decision to prosecute a man for vandalism rather than anti-Semitism for spray-painting dozens of large red swastikas along Paris’s landmark Rue de Rivoli the weekend of October 10-11 sparked protests among members of the Jewish community. The prosecutor’s office stated there was no legal basis for charging the man with a crime aggravated by religious or

racial hatred and that “the damage was committed without specifically targeting buildings identified as being linked to the Jewish community.” In a tweet, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF) expressed “total incomprehension,” asking, “How can you spray 20 swastikas without being prosecuted for anti-Semitism?” Dorothee Bissacia-Bernstein, the lawyer representing LICRA in the case, tweeted after the decision, “Major moment of indignation and anger yes. Stupefaction.” Leader of the far-left France Unbowed Party Jean-Luc Melenchon criticized the “lamentable” decision. The suspect, a man from the country of Georgia, remained in pretrial detention. His trial was rescheduled and remained pending at year’s end.

On January 27, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister of National Education and Youth, and Armin Laschet, German Plenipotentiary for Cultural Affairs under the Franco-German Cooperation Treaty, visited the Shoah Memorial in Paris. In public remarks, they stated the fight against racism and anti-Semitism was and would remain a priority of educational cooperation between the two countries.

On January 9, then-Interior Minister Castaner, then-Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet, and then-Junior Minister for the Interior Laurent Nunez attended a CRIF-organized memorial ceremony outside a Paris kosher supermarket, where five years earlier a gunman had killed four Jews and held 15 other persons hostage.

On July 10, Interior Minister Darmanin attended the Shabbat service at the Great Synagogue of Paris. “The Jews of France had to suffer many unspeakable acts. Attacking the Jews of France, is attacking the Republic,” he said at the end of the visit.

On July 19, Secretary of State for the Armed Forces Genevieve Darrieussecq held a ceremony in Paris honoring the victims of the 1942 Velodrome d’Hiver roundup in which 13,000 Jews, including 4,000 children, were deported to extermination camps. “There is no space for ambiguity, the Velodrome d’Hiver roundup is an issue belonging to France,” Darrieussecq said in her statements, adding, “Two dangers lie in wait for us and must constantly be fought: oblivion and hatred. It is because the Nation knows where it comes from, looks at its past without ambiguity, that it will be intractable in the face of racism, anti-Semitism, and discrimination.”

President Macron and government ministers condemned anti-Semitism and declared support for Holocaust education on several occasions, including a February 19 visit to the Shoah Memorial; the March 19 commemoration of the eighth anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the April 30 Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration; and the June 1 Judaism Day observance. On April 26, as the country held private or virtual ceremonies (because of COVID-19 restrictions) for the thousands of persons deported to Nazi death camps during World War II, President Macron tweeted, “Seventy-five years on, we have not forgotten.” On the same day, Secretary of State for the Armed Forces Darriussecq laid a wreath at the Shoah Memorial and the Memorial of the Martyrs of The Deportation in central Paris.

On July 26, Interior Minister Darmanin participated in a tribute for Father Jacques Hamel, the Catholic priest killed in an attack for which ISIS claimed responsibility at his church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in 2016. In his remarks, Darmanin said Father Hamel was “killed by the Islamist barbarism,” and “killing a priest is like trying to assassinate a part of the nation’s soul.”

On July 29, Interior Minister Darmanin visited Douaumont Cemetery at the Verdun battlefield to pay tribute to Muslim soldiers who died for the country during World War I. Speaking in front of the graves, he warned against “any deviation of the spirit ... that evokes the purported incompatibility between the fact of [religious] belief and being a republican.” He added, “The [French] Republic does not prefer any religion, does not combat any religion.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government postponed the visit of 30 Moroccan, 120 Algerian, and 151 Turkish imams whom it has regularly hosted to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism within Muslim communities.

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

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

The CFCM reported 235 registered incidents targeting Muslims, compared with 154 in 2019. The Jewish Community Protection Service (SPCJ) reported a total of 339 anti-Semitic incidents, of which 295 were threats and 44 violent acts, compared with 687 total incidents in the previous year. Statistics on anti-Christian

incidents were not yet available; most of these incidents involved vandalism of churches and cemeteries.

On October 29, a man entered the Basilica of Notre Dame in the southern city of Nice and killed three Catholic worshippers with a knife. Local press reported one of the two women killed was “practically decapitated.” Municipal police intervened, shooting and seriously injuring the attacker. The attacker, according to local press reports, said, “Allahu Akbar (God is great),” repeatedly as he was being arrested and taken to the hospital. The man was identified as Brahim Aouissaoui, an asylum seeker from Tunisia who entered France in early October. The national counterterrorism prosecutor’s office was treating the attack as a terrorist incident. The investigation was ongoing at year’s end.

On October 16, an 18-year-old Muslim Russian refugee of Chechen ethnicity, Abdoullakh Anzorov, beheaded a French middle-school teacher, Samuel Paty, in the Paris suburb of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine. Paty had shown his students *Charlie Hebdo*’s 2012 cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as part of a lesson on freedom of expression; Paty advised students they could turn away if they did not want to see the images. Police shot and killed Anzorov soon after Paty’s killing and charged 10 other persons, including an imam, with assisting him. President Macron visited the school where Paty had worked, calling the incident “a typical Islamist terrorist attack” and stating that “our compatriot was killed for teaching children freedom of speech.”

On October 18, media reported two women stabbed two other women wearing Islamic headscarves and tried to rip off their veils near the Eiffel Tower in 2019. The women were charged with assault and racist slurs. The main suspect was placed in pretrial detention while the second was released on bail, legal sources reported.

On August 6, two men shouted anti-Semitic insults and assaulted a Jewish man, stole his watch, and beat him unconscious in the hallway of his parents’ apartment building in Paris. Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti tweeted, “I know the immense emotion that besets the entire Jewish community. It is the emotion of the whole nation and of course mine.” Authorities charged the two men with violent theft motivated by religious reasons and placed them in pretrial detention on August 28. At year’s end, a trial had not been scheduled, and the two men remained in detention.

In January, a 16-year-old student in the Lyon region received death threats and withdrew from school due to security concerns after she posted a vulgar anti-Islam video that led to national controversy. The student appeared on television and defended her right to blaspheme, saying her comments came in response to a vulgar online attack on her sexual orientation by a Muslim. The government provided her police protection, and President Macron defended her, telling newspaper *Le Dauphine Libere* that children needed to be “better protected” against “new forms of hatred and harassment online,” adding, “The law is clear: we have the right to blaspheme, to criticize, to caricature religions.” In the ensuing public debate, however, public personalities and officials made a range of statements criticizing the girl for hate speech or defending her right to free speech and French secularism. Abdallah Zekri, general delegate of the CFCM, told Sud Radio that he was against the death threats, but that “who sows the wind, shall reap the whirlwind.” CFCM president Mohammed Moussaoui, in the CFCM’s official response, said, “Nothing can justify” death threats.” Then-Justice Minister Belloubet, in comments she later acknowledged as “maladroit,” called the death threats unacceptable but characterized the video as “an attack on freedom of conscience.”

On May 14, the Paris prosecutor indicted the two suspects in the 2018 killing of Holocaust survivor Mireille Knoll on charges including intentional homicide and targeting the victim based on religion. On July 10, investigative judges affirmed the prosecution of the suspects on charges of murder “of a vulnerable person, committed because of the victim’s religion.” The two individuals remained in pretrial detention and a trial date had not been set at year’s end.

Authorities charged a man with “extortion on account of religion” with aggravated circumstances following an August 26 incident in Strasbourg in which an individual assaulted a young artist hired by the city to decorate a public building for wearing a t-shirt with “Israel” printed on it. After ordering the artist to leave the site, the assailant stole a spray-paint can and wrote on the pavement, “Interdit aux juifs et aux salopes” (“Jews and sluts forbidden”). Both the victim and a local Jewish association filed a complaint. On November 30, the Strasbourg Criminal Court sentenced the assailant to six-months’ imprisonment and ordered him to pay 500 euros (\$610) in compensation to the victim and 1,000 euros (\$1,200) to antiracist groups that had also filed a lawsuit.

On May 26, *Agence France Presse* and other media reported security forces arrested a man, identified only as Aurelien C., in the central city of Limoges. The security forces said they suspected the man, a former member of both the military

and the Yellow Vest protest movement, was planning an attack against the Jewish community. On social media, Aurelien C. had posted white supremacist conspiracy theories and both anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic comments, while glorifying terrorists such as the 2019 Christchurch and 2011 Oslo attackers. On May 12, the Antiterrorism National Prosecutor's Office reportedly began investigating him for "association of criminal terrorist wrongdoers." In his home, investigators reportedly found incendiary tools that could be used as mortars. He had researched when Jewish religious sites would reopen in his town. Aurelien C. had previously been arrested in December 2018 and convicted of illegal arms possession.

In September, two men carried out an armed robbery against a man wearing a Star of David in a suburb of Paris and called him a "dirty Jew." The victim was reportedly an Arab convert to Judaism. One of the robbers, identified only as Mohammed, received a one-year jail sentence.

Also in September, a court in Brest sentenced a man to two months in prison for calling a woman at an office where the man collected his welfare check a "dirty Jewess" and performing a Nazi salute in December 2019.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported six incidents during the year. In one case, they reported a man punched a Jehovah's Witness in the face while he was evangelizing in Le Petit Quevilly, a suburb of Rouen, on March 1. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with police. At year's end, authorities had not filed charges.

The Jewish Agency for Israel reported in June approximately 2,000 persons began the process of emigrating to Israel in the previous month, compared with 200 in May 2019.

On January 20, the AJC released a poll conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) in partnership with the Fondapol think tank. The survey, which polled 505 French Jews between October 14 and November 19, 2019, found that 70 percent said they had been the target of at least one anti-Semitic incident in their lifetime, 64 percent had experienced anti-Semitic verbal abuse at least once, and 23 percent had suffered physical abuse on at least one occasion; 10 percent said they had been attacked several times. The poll found 37 percent refrained from using visible Jewish symbols, 25 percent avoided revealing their Jewish identity in the workplace, and 52 percent had considered leaving the country permanently. Overall, 44 percent said the situation for French Jews was worse than a year

earlier, 11 percent said it was better, and 42 percent said it was unchanged. Among respondents aged 18-24, 84 percent had been the target of at least one anti-Semitic act, 79 percent had experienced verbal abuse, and 39 percent had suffered physical aggression. Jews self-identifying as “religious” felt the most vulnerable; 74 percent said they had been a target of at least one act of verbal abuse. Anti-Semitic incidents occurred most frequently on the street and in schools. Fifty-five percent said they had been insulted or threatened, and 59 percent said they had been physically abused on the street. In schools, 26 percent said they had suffered physical abuse and 54 percent had experienced verbal abuse. In the workplace, 46 percent said they had experienced anti-Semitic verbal abuse.

The poll also questioned 522 non-Jewish citizens. Of this total sample of 1,027 Jewish and non-Jewish persons, 73 percent (and 72 percent of Jewish respondents) considered anti-Semitism a problem that affected all of society; 47 percent (and 67 percent of Jews) reported the level of anti-Semitism in the country was high, while 27 percent (and 22 percent of Jews) said it was low. Fifty-three percent of non-Jews, but 77 percent of Jewish respondents, said they had the feeling that anti-Semitism in the country was increasing.

A poll of youths conducted by IFOP, carried out on September 4-9 and released on September 13, showed 87 percent of respondents had heard about the Holocaust and 95 percent had heard about the gas chambers; 80 percent reported learning these facts at school. One in 10 students said it was impossible to teach about the Holocaust in their class (among the reasons cited was a refusal by some students to listen to the lesson), and 21 percent cited criticisms from other students during lessons about the subject. The survey also revealed the influence of Holocaust denial on online video platforms and social media networks; nearly one in three (29 percent) respondents said they had already read or viewed content questioning the existence of the Holocaust. Of these, 57 percent had encountered denial theories on YouTube and 40 percent on Facebook.

In February, the Pew Research Center published findings on attitudes towards democratic principles, such as regular elections, free speech, and free civil society, as well as religious freedom, in 34 countries, based on interviews it conducted in its *Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey*. According to the findings, 52 percent of French respondents considered religious freedom to be “very important” but ranked it the lowest of their priorities for democratic principles among the nine tested.

The annual report of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an advisory body to the Prime Minister, released on June 18, included the results of an Ipsos poll conducted in November 2019 and involving face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 1,323 residents over the age of 18. The results were almost identical to a poll Ipsos conducted a year earlier. According to the more recent poll, 34.2 percent (1.8 percent fewer than in 2018) of respondents believed Jews “have a particular relationship with money,” and 18.6 percent (1.4 percent fewer than the previous year) thought Jews had too much power in the country. The poll found 35.5 percent (29 percent in 2018) of respondents had a negative image of Islam, and 44.7 percent (44 percent in the previous year) considered it a threat to national identity. The commission’s report again cited what it said was persistent societal rejection of Islamic religious practices, such as women wearing a veil (45.5 percent).

In June, during an antiracism protest in Paris attended by 15-20,000 persons, a video of at least one man repeatedly shouting “Dirty Jews” at a counterprotesting white identity group went viral. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* cited CRIF as stating that anti-Semites had infiltrated the protest, “using a noble cause, the fight against racism, to spread hatred against Jews and Israel.” According to the report, CRIF President Francis Kalifat asked, “How can this type of incitement be shouted again and again without people reacting and demanding that those people leave?”

According to press reports, April Benayoum, runner-up in the 2021 Miss France competition, became the subject of “a torrent” of anti-Semitic comments on social media after revealing that her father was Israeli during the televised competition on December 19. One message read, “Hitler forgot about this one.” On December 20, Interior Minister Darmanin tweeted that he was “deeply shocked” and promised law enforcement would investigate the incidents. Others, including the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the Israeli embassy in Paris, and the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions, also denounced the comments. The Paris Prosecutor’s Office opened an investigation on December 21.

Facebook confirmed on August 3 it had banned French comedian Dieudonne M’Bala from its platforms for repeatedly violating its policies by posting anti-Semitic comments and for his “organized hatred.” In June, YouTube also banned Dieudonne, who had more than one million followers on Facebook and 36,000 on Instagram. Elisabeth Moreno, the Minister in Charge of Gender Equality, Diversity, and Equality of Opportunities welcomed the bans, tweeting, “All forms of speech inciting hatred and racism must be banned on social media.” Dieudonne was convicted multiple times for hate speech, including anti-Semitism. In

October, in contravention of COVID-19 confinement orders, Dieudonne held an unauthorized gathering near Strasbourg attended by approximately 300 supporters, where he repeated the same anti-Semitic comments and spread disinformation relating to Jews about the pandemic.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency cited other instances of disinformation blaming Jews for COVID-19. For example, in March, a caricature of a Jewish former Health Minister, Agnes Buzyn, showing her poisoning a well, was shared tens of thousands of times on social media. Alain Soral posted on YouTube that the virus was being used by “the luminary community, which we are forbidden to name ... to weaken French people by the sheer weight of the death toll.” According to the agency, Soral’s post was viewed 406,000 times. The same report cited Marc Knobel, a historian with CRIF, as stating, “...the coronavirus pandemic is a reminder that Jews will be blamed whenever there’s an epidemic, be it today or 1347.”

On January 5, vandals damaged several headstones, burial vaults, and a memorial to a young child deported to Auschwitz at the oldest Jewish cemetery in the country, located in Bayonne. The cemetery contained Jewish burial sites dating to the late 17th century. The president of the Bayonne/Biarritz Jewish community condemned the desecrations, stating, “When it comes to attacking the dead, I don’t think there is anything more cowardly.”

On August 7, unknown persons set fire to the Omar Mosque in Bron, a suburb of Lyon. President of the regional CFCM Kamel Kabtane denounced the act. He had said previously the country trivialized anti-Muslim speech and acts. Regional and religious leaders, such as Interior Minister Darmanin and Mohammed Moussaoui, President of the Union of Mosques of France, expressed solidarity against the suspected arson and stated the country was experiencing a “rise of hatred.” They called for the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate and address these issues.

A fire broke out at the Essalam Mosque in the city of Lyon on August 12, only days after the suspected arson at the Omar Mosque in Bron. The mayor of Lyon’s 2nd Arrondissement, Pierre Oliver, condemned the burning of the mosque, which a preliminary investigation suggested was also the result of arson. Hackers also changed the website link to the Essalam Mosque on the Google Maps site to a pest control site.

On April 15, the president of the Turkish Cultural Association (ACTS) of Saint-Etienne discovered a death threat written on the association door that he called “clearly Islamophobic.” Saint-Etienne Mayor Gael Perdriau expressed support for all ACTS members. The mayor highlighted the group’s societal contributions, including a recent donation of masks to nursing staff at the local teaching hospital.

On January 19, unknown individuals in Bordeaux and Talence defaced eight churches and two Catholic schools with graffiti. Several of the “tags” referred to pedophilia. Archbishop of Bordeaux Jean Paul James expressed his “profound sadness in the face of such acts,” condemned “this form of violence against Christians,” and offered to support “those who felt injured by these ... obscene insults.” A police investigation was ongoing.

On April 22, members of the far-right group Generation Identitaire projected pictures denouncing calls to prayer onto the facade of the Grand Mosque of Lyon. The text read, “Lyon, Strasbourg, Marseille, Germany, Spain. Stop! The song of the muezzin will not resonate in Europe. Generation Identitaire.” The group claimed responsibility on Twitter. Marine Le Pen, president of the National Rally Party, had also publicly complained to the Interior Ministry about the Grand Mosque of Lyon’s daily broadcasts of the calls to prayer.

The hashtag #sijetaitunjuif (If I were a Jew) trended on Twitter France on May 18 before the company took it down, following condemnation by officials and Jewish and anti-hate organizations. The hashtag originated with six coordinated individual users and was amplified by other users and groups who deployed it with anti-Semitic smears and references to the Holocaust. The author of one of the original tweets, a 16-year-old boy, told media outlet BFM he had posted the material “to see if people would defend Jews.” Twitter France told BFM it took the hashtag off its list of trending topics for violating the company’s hate speech rules.

On June 23, anti-Semitic graffiti and drawings were found on campaign posters for Lyon Metropolis President David Kimelfeld. Also on June 23, anti-Muslim stickers were found on campaign posters of Nordine Gasmi, the Vaudais Independent Party mayoral candidate, in nearby Vaulx-en-Velin. Kimelfeld denounced the graffiti, and local Member of Parliament Thomas Rudigoz called the anti-Semitic tags “despicable,” saying they recalled dark times in the country’s history.

In the early hours of July 26, a mosque in the southwestern French city of Agen was vandalized with graffiti that included a swastika and obscene messages.

Interior Minister Darmanin tweeted supported for Agen’s Muslim community and condemned “hateful actions that are contrary to the values of the Republic.” Agen Mayor Jean Dionis du Sejour denounced the vandalism as “absolutely unacceptable ... insulting [and] senseless.”

Anti-Islam graffiti was discovered on September 2 on the walls of a mosque in the southwestern city of Tarbes, according to media reports. The incident occurred on the opening day of the trial for the 2015 Paris terror attacks. Interior Minister Darmanin tweeted, “These acts have no place in our Republic.” Regional officials, including the president of the Occitanie Region and the prefect of the Hautes-Pyrenees Department, also publicly condemned the act. Mayor of Tarbes Gerard Tremege visited the site and said he was “outraged by these heinous acts of desecration.” The CFCM also expressed “firm condemnation” and “full solidarity and total support to the faithful and officials of the mosque.”

On October 2, the Association of Jewish Students tweeted a video of a kosher restaurant in the 19th Arrondissement of Paris that had been vandalized with many swastikas and the words “Hitler was right” spray-painted on furniture and walls.

The Nour El Mohamadi Mosque in central Bordeaux was vandalized on October 14 and October 20. Unknown individuals broke exterior windows and defaced it with graffiti that included Celtic crosses and the phrase “Mahomet = Lache” (Mohammed = Coward). Interior Minister Darmanin asked local authorities to put the mosque under police protection, stating on Twitter, “Such actions are unacceptable on the soil of the Republic.” A police investigation was ongoing at year’s end. Mosque Vice President Abdelaziz Manaa noted a recent increase in anti-Muslim hostility: “There are people who insult us from the street ... but now, we feel that it is getting worse. We’ve never had insults against the Prophet.”

On January 10, Jehovah’s Witnesses filed a complaint with police after they found a graffito, “God kills,” on the door of a Kingdom Hall in Paris on January 10. At year’s end, law enforcement had not identified any suspects.

On April 17, the Angouleme criminal court found an 18-year-old man guilty of, but not responsible for, desecrating numerous graves in a Christian cemetery in Cognac in 2019. A psychiatric evaluation of the man before his trial concluded his judgment was impaired at the time of the incident. The court ordered his emergency hospitalization in a specialized center following the verdict.

Authorities closed the case against Claude Sinke, who died on February 26, before the case could go to trial. Sinke was arrested and charged with attempted murder after he allegedly shot and injured two Muslim men and set fire to the door of a mosque in Bayonne in 2019.

At year's end, there was no information available on the status of a case involving four men arrested in 2019, who were part of a larger group of approximately 10 men alleged to have beaten and robbed a Jewish driver for a ride-sharing company. At the time, authorities said they considered the anti-Semitic nature of the attack to be an aggravating circumstance.

Authorities were still investigating a case from 2019 in which they charged a man with attempted murder and degrading a place of worship after he crashed his car into a mosque in Colmar. According to some press reports, the man was diagnosed with schizophrenia, which might lead to dismissal of the case.

On September 9, the G9, a Lyon-based interfaith group, founded following terrorist attacks in 2015 with the aim of promoting understanding among religious groups and fighting against violent extremism, wrote an open letter with calling for fraternity after multiple acts of vandalism at places of worship. In the letter, entitled "More than ever determined to work for the Common Good," the G9 challenged citizens and authorities to be vigilant and create strong connections wherever possible.

The Council of Christian Churches in France, composed of 10 representatives from the Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic Churches, continued to meet four times a year, twice in plenary session and twice at the working level.

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

The Ambassador designated combating anti-Semitism as one of four key "pillars" of enhanced embassy outreach. Coupled with the embassy's broad campaign supporting religious freedom, the Ambassador and other staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs actively pursued opportunities to engage on fighting anti-Semitism and bolstering religious freedom and tolerance with relevant government officials, including at the religious affairs offices of the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs and DILCRAH. Topics discussed included religious tolerance, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, the role of religious freedom in lessening violent extremism, the BDS movement, Holocaust-related compensation, and bilateral cooperation on these issues.

Staff from the embassy, consulates general, and APPs met regularly in person and virtually with religious community leaders, activists, and private citizens throughout the country to discuss issues of discrimination and to advocate tolerance for diversity. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and interfaith dialogue and tolerance with senior Christian, Muslim, and Jewish representatives and NGOs such as Coexister and AJC Europe. They also hosted meetings with representatives from CRIF, the Israelite Central Consistory of France (the main Jewish administrative governance body), the CFCM, and the Paris Great Mosque, Catholic priests, and Protestant representatives working on interfaith dialogue.

The Ambassador and embassy personnel engaged regularly with senior Israeli embassy representatives on efforts and best practices to counter anti-Semitism in the country. Embassy officials closely monitored the official government position on the BDS movement and anti-Semitic incidents. In February, senior embassy officials visited the Quatzenheim Jewish cemetery in Alsace, where vandals had desecrated 90 Jewish graves with anti-Semitic images and slogans in 2019. The local newspaper covered the visit to the cemetery with local leaders, and the embassy amplified the event on its social media platforms to bring visibility to the issue and to publicly express U.S. support for the fight against anti-Semitism.

While much of the embassy's planned outreach was curtailed or significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the embassy, APPs, and consulates general continued to reach out to religious communities, especially through virtual programs.

The embassy continued to support Coexister, a local association promoting interfaith dialogue and social cohesion, with funding assistance for the association's Interfaith World Tour. Four young interfaith representatives concluded an eight-month world tour in 2019-20 to meet with interfaith leaders in 18 countries, including the United States. The team was producing a documentary film about the tour to be used for presentations at French public schools and conferences with the aim of deepening awareness of, and interest in, international initiatives on interfaith dialogue.

A new embassy-supported program against extremism and anti-Semitism with local NGO Insitut Hozes (founded by a past participant in an embassy-sponsored exchange program in the United States) began on December 28 to support interfaith "boot camps" to create shared experiences for Jewish and Muslim

teenagers in the Paris suburbs, groups that rarely have opportunities to interact. The aim is for the groups to then work together to organize community service activities and act as a force of positive change in their communities.

In May, an embassy-sponsored webinar engaged civil society leaders, including those representing religious minorities, on combating religiously and ethnically motivated terrorism, as well as discrimination and violence targeting religious and ethnic minorities.

In July, the embassy organized a virtual encounter between representatives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Holocaust memorials and museums around France to share best practices in engaging young people on the lessons of the Holocaust.

The consulate general in Strasbourg hosted a meeting in February with senior embassy officers for local government, law enforcement, religious, and civil society leaders to discuss collaboration opportunities to fight growing anti-Semitism across the region. Breakfast was followed by a visit of one of the embassy officers with local community leaders to the Quatzenheim Jewish cemetery, where vandals had desecrated and painted swastikas on gravestones in 2019.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (March-April), the consulate general in Strasbourg consulted with the Jewish Consistory to assess growing disinformation among extremist groups that the Jewish population had caused the pandemic. In September, the consulate general hosted an interfaith lunch with key local government, civil society, and religious authorities to discuss the continued rise in anti-Semitic acts in the eastern part of the country, as well as issues of radicalization and violent extremism among the Muslim community.

In September, the APP in Lyon invited five religious leaders of the G9 group to discuss their collective editorial in national newspaper *Le Parisien* after two mosques and one Christian library in the region were vandalized that same month. During the meeting, the APP representative discussed the concerns of local Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders over President Macron's proposed antiseperatism measures, particularly related to the issue of foreign trained imams.

The made-for-television film "RAMDAM," supported by APP Bordeaux and written with an imam and a past embassy-sponsored visitor to the United States, aired on French television in May. The fictional film, showcasing the daily stories,

struggles, and triumphs of a local imam, blended humor, compassion, and current topics aimed at presenting a more nuanced view of Muslim communities.

In April, the Consul General in Marseille attended an online commemoration ceremony in memory of the persons deported from the Camp des Milles internment camp during WWII. In August, the new Consul General visited the Camp des Milles, where she laid a wreath and spent the day touring the site with its director, meeting with survivors and local residents.

In September, the APP in Rennes hosted a meeting with regional representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities, as well other civil society representatives. The Principal Officer facilitated an exchange of ideas and perspectives on the impact of current issues, including the COVID-19 epidemic, on different communities. Jewish and Muslim representatives reiterated their commitments to maintaining their positive existing relationships and ongoing dialogue on areas of shared interest.

The embassy regularly amplified messages from the Secretary of State and Department of State on religious freedom via embassy social media platforms in French and in English. The embassy also complemented information supplied by the Department of State with original content in French, for example by marking the International Day of Religious Freedom and condemning antireligious, mostly anti-Semitic acts, such as the killing of Samuel Paty. Embassy social media outreach highlighted the importance of religious freedom as a core American value and demonstrated how France and the United States worked together on the issue.