

# MONACO 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and its public expression and prohibits compelling participation in religious ceremonies. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and state ceremonies often include Catholic rituals. Religious groups must apply to the government to build a public place of worship and to receive recognition, which provides certain legal rights and privileges. Optional Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools. Jehovah's Witnesses stated that, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the group did not apply again for recognition as a religious group, after three government rejections in prior years. Without recognition, the government and Jehovah's Witnesses said the group could not open a place of worship in the country.

The only private religious schools were Catholic. According to the government, while the law permits private, non-Catholic religious schools, there was insufficient demand for them. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives again said there was no need for them to open a religious school but believed the government would likely agree, if asked, to a request to open one.

In December, the U.S. Consul General in Marseille discussed the state of religious freedom in the country with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In September, a representative from the Consulate General in Marseille discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom with members of the Jehovah's Witness, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities. These issues included whether there had been any religiously motivated incidents or limits restricting religious practices, the establishment of places of worship, and government attitudes towards religious schools.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31,000 (midyear 2020 estimate), of whom 7,600 are citizens. According to a December 2019 estimate by the Monaco Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the total population is 38,100, of whom 8,400 are citizens. The French government estimates 93 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Protestant officials state Protestants represent 2 percent of the population, with 200-220 families. According to press reports and observers in the country, the Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 300 members. According to the European Jewish Congress and the

local Association Culturelle Israelite (Jewish Cultural Association), approximately 1,000 residents, most of whom are noncitizens, are Jewish. According to a long-time Muslim resident, there is a small Muslim community of approximately 200 persons, most of whom are noncitizens from North Africa. Jehovah's Witnesses report 200 members who work in the country, 20 of whom reside there. A small number of residents adhere to other religious beliefs.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution guarantees individuals freedom of religion and public worship and protects the freedom to express opinions on all issues, provided no crimes are committed in the exercise of those freedoms. No one may be compelled to participate in the rites or ceremonies of any religion or to observe its days of rest.

The constitution states Roman Catholicism is the state religion. The Catholic Archbishop of Monaco occupies the highest office of state below the sovereign and the Minister of State.

Religious associations wishing to establish an office or place of worship, own or lease property, or hire employees must first obtain official recognition from the Ministry of the Interior, which must respond to such requests within one month or approval is automatic. The government has granted recognition to the Protestant, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities.

In addition to obtaining official government recognition, any religious group wishing to construct a place of worship in a public space must seek prior approval from the Ministry of Interior.

The government does not tax religious institutions.

Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools as an option and requires parental authorization. Private schools, including those operated by religious groups, must apply for government authorization. If approved, the schools may provide instruction in religions other than Catholicism.

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

### **Government Practices**

Jehovah's Witnesses stated they did not reapply for recognition as a religious group because the COVID-19 pandemic raised new priorities, such as closing their neighboring houses of worship in southern France and reorganizing worship services to broadcast online. The government rejected the group's three previous applications – the most recent in 2019 – despite a Supreme Court ruling annulling the first two rejections describing the group as a danger to public order, extreme and intolerant, and hostile to the Catholic Church and other religions. Jehovah's Witnesses stated that without government recognition they remained unable to establish a headquarters in the country where they could worship and welcome new members.

Catholic rituals continued to be a part of many state ceremonies, including annual national day celebrations.

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

As in previous years, the only private religious schools were Catholic. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there was insufficient demand for such schools. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives said there was no need for them to open a religious school but believed the government would likely agree, if asked, to a request to open one.

Places of worship included six Catholic churches, two Protestant churches, and one synagogue. The Russian Orthodox Church continued to use a Reformed Protestant church building until it could identify a location to construct its own church. According to religious groups, it was difficult to build new places of worship due to high real estate prices. There were no mosques in the country.

A member of the Muslim community stated the community did not want to be officially recognized because most members did not practice their religion and it would be too expensive to build a place of worship. Muslims worshiped at a mosque in Beausoleil, just across the border in France, and in private prayer rooms in their own residences. Jehovah's Witnesses also worshipped in nearby locations in Menton, Beausoleil, or Nice in France.

On March 8, Father Dominique-Marie David became the new Catholic Archbishop of Monaco.

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

In December, the U.S. Consul General in Marseille discussed the state of religious freedom in the country with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Representatives from the Consulate General in Marseille spoke with Jehovah's Witnesses representatives several times to discuss their religious freedom concerns, including the government's refusal to recognize the group.

In September, consulate general staff spoke with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as with members of the United Protestant Church – one of the country's two Protestant churches – and Jehovah's Witnesses. They discussed the groups' views on issues pertaining to their exercise of religious freedom in the country, including whether there had been any religiously motivated incidents or limits restricting religious practices, the establishment of places of worship, and government attitudes towards religious schools.