

CANADA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, and the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination based on religion. The government does not require religious groups to register, but some registered groups may receive tax-exempt status. Provincial governments continued to impose societal-wide restrictions on assembly, including for all faith groups, to limit the transmission of COVID-19. Some religious communities said provincial orders and additional measures were discriminatory against religious groups because mass gatherings for sports events and other functions were permitted. There were multiple reports across the country of clergy opposing or refusing to adhere to COVID-19 restrictions on the grounds that the restrictions infringed on religious freedom. In October, a Manitoba judge ruled provincial restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 were reasonable and did not violate constitutional rights to worship and to assemble for religious practice and dismissed a class-action lawsuit filed by seven churches in Manitoba in June, according to press reports. In the suit, the plaintiffs stated that public health orders that restricted in-person church services to 10 persons or 25 percent of capacity infringed on their religious freedom and caused a “crisis of conscience.” The Quebec government filed an appeal in June of an April legal ruling that allowed limited exemptions to a 2019 provincial law prohibiting certain provincial government employees from wearing religious symbols while exercising their official functions. The ruling exempted English-language schools in the majority French-speaking province and elected members of the provincial legislature but upheld the law for other categories of provincial employees. In April, an Alberta school requested a judge overturn a decision by the Alberta Human Rights Commission ordering the school to allow two Muslim students to pray on school property and to pay compensation of 18,000 Canadian dollars (\$14,100) to each of them, plus interest. In July, a federal judge ruled that the federal government had denied Redeemer University in Ontario procedural fairness in its application for funding under the federal Canada Summer Jobs Program because it was a faith-based institution. The judge ordered the government of Canada to pay the university’s legal fees.

Reports continued of anti-Muslim and antisemitic incidents, including cases of violence, hate speech, harassment, discrimination, and vandalism. In July, Statistics Canada reported 515 incidents of police-reported, religiously motivated hate crimes in 2020, 16 percent fewer than in 2019. According to B’nai B’rith

Canada, more antisemitic incidents were reported to the organization in May than in all of 2020, 2019, and 2018 combined. The increase occurred at the same time protests were taking place across the country in response to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The group also stated that incidents of antisemitism tended to increase during federal or provincial election campaigns. The B'nai B'rith Canada League for Human Rights recorded 2,610 reports of antisemitic incidents in 2020, compared with 2,207 in 2019. According to press reports, in June, a man driving a truck in London, Ontario struck five members of a Muslim family, killing four of them. Police said the driver targeted the family because they were Muslim and charged the driver with four counts of first degree murder, one count of attempted murder, and one count of terrorism. The trial remained pending at year's end. In June, an unidentified man attacked two Muslim women in Alberta, grabbing one of the women by her hijab, pushing her to the ground, and knocking her unconscious, according to media reports. In January, police charged a man with threatening to set fire to a place of worship and possession of incendiary materials after he painted swastikas on Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, one of Montreal's largest synagogues, and brought a canister of gasoline to the site. In July, unidentified individuals vandalized 11 churches, some Catholic and some Protestant, in Calgary, Alberta with red and orange paint. In June and July, unidentified individuals set fire to several Roman Catholic churches in indigenous communities across the country after the discovery of unmarked graves believed to be of indigenous children on or near sites of former Indian residential schools. Catholic and Protestant religious groups operated most of the schools and, according to media, the government funded them to force the assimilation of indigenous children into the dominant Canadian culture and strip them of their native culture, language, and religion.

Embassy, consulate, and other U.S. government officials emphasized the need for respect for religious freedom and diversity with national and provincial governments. They likewise reaffirmed U.S. government commitment to addressing discrimination and exclusion through the U.S.-Canada Roadmap for Renewed Partnership. The roadmap is a strategic document of shared policy priorities. Embassy and other U.S. government officials met with representatives from Global Affairs Canada's Office of Diversity and Inclusion to discuss issues of religious freedom in the country, including religious expression, inclusion, and tolerance. Throughout the year, the embassy and consulates used social media to amplify religious freedom messaging from senior Department of State officials. In August, the consulate general in Calgary hosted a virtual panel on the intersection of identity and religion. The event featured spokespersons from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. In July, a senior embassy official and in October, the

Charge d’Affaires held roundtables with religious and secular leaders in Quebec City to discuss the relationship between religious freedom and secularism in Quebec.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 37.9 million (midyear 2021). According to the 2011 census, which has the most recent data available on religion, approximately 67 percent of the population self-identifies as Christian. Roman Catholics constitute the largest Christian group (38 percent of the total population), followed by the United Church of Canada (6 percent), Anglicans (5 percent), Baptists (1.9 percent), and Christian Orthodox (1.7 percent). Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Pentecostal groups each constitute less than 2 percent of the population. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints estimates its membership at 199,000. The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS Church) estimates its membership at 1,000. The Hutterites, or Hutterite Brethren, which number approximately 35,000, are an Anabaptist ethnoreligious group living primarily in Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan Provinces. Approximately 3 percent of the population is Muslim, and 1 percent Jewish. Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Scientologists, Baha’is, and adherents of Shintoism, Taoism, and aboriginal spirituality together constitute less than 4 percent of the population. Approximately 24 percent of the population list no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, and expression. Every individual is equal under the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination based on religion. The law imposes “reasonable limits” on the exercise of these religious rights only where such restrictions can be “demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.” The law permits individuals to sue the government for violations of religious freedom. Federal and provincial human rights laws prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. Civil remedies include compensation and/or changes to the policy or practice responsible for the discrimination.

The law does not require religious groups to register, but the government grants tax-exempt status to religious groups that register as nonprofit organizations with

the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency. Nonprofit status provides such organizations with federal and provincial sales tax reductions, rebates, and exemptions. To gain and retain tax-exempt status, a group must be nonpolitical and undergo periodic audits. Charitable status also grants members of the clergy various federal benefits, including a housing deduction under the tax code and expedited processing through the immigration system. The term “clergy” includes persons whose communities have licensed, ordained, or otherwise formally recognized them for their religious leadership and authority to perform spiritual duties and services within their religious organization. Individual citizens who donate to tax-exempt religious groups receive a federal tax receipt entitling them to federal income tax deductions.

A 2019 Quebec provincial law on secularism prohibits certain provincial government employees from wearing religious symbols while exercising their official functions. The law defines a religious symbol as “any object including clothing, a symbol, jewelry, an adornment, an accessory, or headwear; that (1) is worn in connection with a religious conviction or belief; or (2) is reasonably considered as referring to a religious affiliation.” Classes of individuals and offices covered by the law include the president and vice presidents of the national assembly; administrative justices of the peace; certain municipal court employees; police, sheriffs, and deputy sheriffs; certain prosecutors and criminal lawyers; and certain principals, vice principals, and teachers, among others. The law also requires anyone seeking certain provincial government services to do so with “face uncovered.” The law invokes the “notwithstanding clause” of the federal constitution, which permits a province to override specific constitutional protections for a period of five years to prevent citizens from bringing challenges to the law based on the federal constitution. The law is subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms after the five-year period if the exemption is not renewed. The law exempts provincial employees working prior to the implementation of the law; however, they lose their right to wear religious symbols upon changing jobs or receiving a promotion.

Government policy and practices regarding education, including regulation of religious schools, fall under the purview of the provincial, rather than federal, governments. Six of the 10 provinces provide full or partial funding to some religious schools.

Catholic and Protestant schools in Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan retain the federal constitutionally protected right to public funding they gained when those provinces joined the federation. Other provinces either had no legally recognized

denominational schools that qualified for such protection at the time of federation or accession, or they subsequently secured a federal constitutional amendment allowing them to terminate religious education funding rights and introduce an exclusively secular publicly funded education system. Federal statutory protection for Catholic and Protestant publicly funded minority education exists in the Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories, which do not have provincial status. Constitutional or federal statutory protection for public funding of religious education does not extend to schools of other religious groups, although British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec offer partial funding to religious schools of any faith that meet provincial scholastic criteria. The laws permit parents to homeschool their children or enroll them in private schools for religious reasons.

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

Government Practices

In May, the Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal of the sentence of a Quebec man who shot and killed six Muslim worshipers in the Grand Mosque in Quebec City in 2017. The Quebec government appealed a 2019 lower court decision that reduced the man's 40-year cumulative sentence to the maximum single term of 25 years without eligibility for parole on the grounds that consecutive sentencing constituted harsh and unusual punishment and violated the country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Supreme Court scheduled the appeal hearing for March 24, 2022.

Provinces continued to temporarily ban in-person religious gatherings or imposed restrictions that varied by province and limited the number of persons permitted to gather to stem transmission of COVID-19. Restrictions fluctuated during the pandemic based on local conditions and governmental decisions. Some religious communities said provincial orders and additional measures were discriminatory against religious groups. For example, in June, seven churches in Manitoba filed a class action lawsuit against the province's COVID-19 health orders that restricted in-person church services to 10 persons or 25 percent of capacity. The suit stated the public health orders infringed on their religious freedom and caused a "crisis of conscience." In October, a Manitoba judge ruled pandemic restrictions put in place by the province were not a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the public health orders were reasonable limitations on the groups' rights. Throughout the year, individual clergy across the country were also fined and arrested for not complying with COVID-19 orders. For example, in June, an

Alberta judge found Fortress of Adullam Street Church Pastor Artur Pawlowski and his brother David Pawlowski guilty of contempt of court for deliberately and repeatedly violating COVID-19 health orders, including by organizing in-person church services in violation of provincial capacity limits. In October, an Alberta court sentenced Pawlowski and his brother to prison time, fines, 18 months' probation, including community service hours, and required that any time they exercised their right of free speech and spoke against the Alberta Health Services' orders – whether in person or online – they state they were aware that their views were not held by the majority of medical experts in Alberta. In May, three Ontario churches challenged the constitutionality of lockdown measures in their province. The hearing remained pending at year's end.

In February, authorities arrested GraceLife Pastor James Coates in Alberta for holding in-person church services in violation of the province's 15 percent capacity limit and for violating a previous warning issued by Alberta health authorities. Authorities ordered his release in February, but he refused to comply with the bail terms to not hold in-church services and remained in custody for 35 days, until March 29. In April, Alberta health authorities and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took custody of the GraceLife Church building, located in the Edmonton area, and barricaded it with temporary fences for continued violations of provincial capacity limits for in-person worship. In June, an Alberta court ruled Coates' rights were not violated when he was ticketed and arrested for violating COVID-19 restrictions. Authorities returned the church building to the congregation on July 1 after Alberta rescinded the health orders.

In January, British Columbia (B.C.) health authorities temporarily prohibited in-person worship services and public gatherings to stem transmission of COVID-19. The RCMP fined three B.C. churches for holding in-person services. Church representatives filed a legal challenge to the public health orders on the basis the orders violated their constitutional right to worship in-person. They also said the government allowed restaurants and other businesses to remain open with fewer restrictions and that Orthodox Jewish synagogues were granted permission to hold indoor services. The B.C. supreme (trial) court dismissed the case and upheld the restrictions in March. The churches appealed the trial court ruling, and trial dates for the three pastors were scheduled for January 2022. Also in March, B.C. authorities revised public health orders and allowed churches and other faith communities to hold outdoor services with a 25 percent capacity if COVID-19 safety plans were in place. In January, Quebec officials proposed a limit of 10 persons for religious gatherings per place of worship as part of enhanced COVID-19 restrictions. The Jewish Community Council of Montreal, as well as the Jewish

Hasidic Council of Quebec and several other ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups, urged the government to interpret the public health order as accommodating 10 persons per room in a multispace venue if each room had independent access to the street and did not share a common space, allowing a greater number of persons to take part in religious ceremonies. Municipal guidance changed three times over the course of 48 hours, leading to confusion and the ticketing by police of more than 200 members of the Jewish community for exceeding the 10-person limit. The Hasidic Jewish Council sought an injunction against the 10-person limit, and a Quebec trial court judge ruled in its favor. In March, Quebec changed its COVID-19 regulations to allow a maximum of 250 persons inside a house of worship and 500 persons for an outdoor service. In December, it reduced capacity to 50 percent for places of worship and other venues.

In December, the Western Quebec School Board removed a Chelsea, Quebec elementary school teacher from the classroom for wearing a hijab, citing the provincial law on secularism. Board interim chair Wayne Daly said the board erred in hiring the teacher without knowing she wore a hijab and withdrew her from the classroom in compliance with the law. Daly said that all principals at schools within the Western Quebec School Board had received a memo outlining the law and were instructed to “take it into consideration when you’re hiring teachers.” He said, however, that the law was unethical, and the board was categorically opposed to the law on secularism. The teacher remained employed with the school board, which transferred her to an administrative position working on “inclusion and diversity literacy.” The teacher’s case was raised in parliament. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reiterated the government’s concerns regarding the law, saying on December 15, “I don’t think that in a free and democratic society, a person should lose their job because of their religion.” He said on December 17 that the federal government continued to “reflect” on future action, including potentially asking the Supreme Court for an advisory ruling or clarification on how the constitution’s notwithstanding clause should be used.

In April, an Alberta school requested a judge overturn a 2020 decision by the Alberta Human Rights Commission that ordered it to allow two Muslim students to pray and to pay them 18,000 Canadian dollars (\$14,100) each plus interest as the remedy for having denied them a space to pray. The school had accommodated the boys’ request for prayer space briefly after enrollment in 2011 but withdrew permission on the basis that it contravened the school’s secular character. When the boys continued to pray, the school expelled them. School officials stated the ruling created a double standard at the school, which they said focused on

academic achievement and secular multiculturalism. The court dismissed the school's appeal in July.

In October, Quebec Education Minister Jean-Francois Roberge unveiled a new mandatory "Culture and Quebec Citizenship" course to replace the former Ethics and Religious Culture program in the province's public schools. The program, scheduled to be implemented in classrooms across Quebec at the start of the 2022 school year, is built upon three main aspects: culture, Quebec citizenship, and dialogue/critical thinking. Observers stated the change aligned with the government's wider vision of a secular Quebec and was consistent with its passage of legislation prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols by certain provincial public employees.

In February, the country's Supreme Court dismissed an appeal filed by the Public Schools of Saskatchewan – a coalition of school boards in the province's secular, publicly funded education system – and upheld a March 2020 lower court decision that stated non-Catholic students attending a Catholic school in the province may receive public funding for their schooling. Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe applauded the decision, stating, "Our government strongly supports parent and student choice in education, including Saskatchewan's public, separate, and faith-based schools," and, "...Students have the right to attend public or separate schools, regardless of their religious affiliation." According to Tom Fortosky, executive director of the Saskatchewan Catholic School Boards Association, the Supreme Court's decision was a "welcome relief."

In July, a federal judge ruled the federal government had denied Redeemer University in Ontario procedural fairness in its application for funding under the Canada Summer Jobs Program because it was a faith-based institution affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. The school had taken part in the Canada Summer Jobs program since 2006, but the federal government rejected its application in 2018 on the grounds the school failed to demonstrate measures to provide a workplace free of harassment and discrimination. LGBTQI+ students and alumni said that Redeemer's disciplinary policy that restricted sexual behavior on religious grounds to relations within heterosexual marriage discriminated based on sexual orientation. The judge also ruled the federal government failed to conduct a fair and unbiased assessment of Redeemer's application because government officials sought no clarification of measures taken by Redeemer to provide an equitable workplace. The judge stated that there was no evidence the ministry made any overt attempt to consider Redeemer's rights to freedom of

religion, expression, and association. He ordered the federal government to pay the university's legal fees.

In February, a student in Ontario said he was dismissed from the Ryerson University student newspaper because he held orthodox Catholic beliefs that included the belief that being homosexual or transgender was sinful. The student filed a complaint of discrimination based on religious belief with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal and sought 200,000 Canadian dollars (\$157,000) in compensation, plus the development of human rights codes at the school newspaper. The tribunal found in the student's favor and the parties reached a settlement in October in which the student newspaper issued a letter of regret, according to press reports.

Also in February, the University of Toronto's Complaint and Resolution Council for Student Societies found the Graduate Students' Union Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Committee could not use student fees to promote the anti-Israel boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement. The case was brought to the council by a Jewish student with the assistance of B'nai B'rith Canada, which said the BDS movement was antisemitic. According to Michael Mostyn, chief executive officer of B'nai B'rith Canada, the decision was a "...massive victory for Jewish students at the University of Toronto and across Canada."

In June, a Quebec man said provincial child protection authorities took custody of his three-day-old baby and discriminated against him because he was Muslim and because his wife wore a hijab and did not speak French. The man said child welfare authorities removed the baby from the family because he and his wife refused certain blood tests for genetic and heredity testing and because hospital staff accused his wife of shaking the baby and not waking up to feed the infant, actions the father denied. The parents went to court to regain custody of the child.

In October, Prime Minister Trudeau announced the government would make the role of the country's Special Envoy for Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Fighting anti-Semitism a permanent position and bolster the position with more resources. Trudeau said the Special Envoy would be responsible for developing the country's national plan to combat all forms of hate and antisemitism.

In January, councilors from Montreal, Quebec's most populous borough, Cote-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grace, voted to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Elsewhere, debate on the IHRA continued throughout the year.

In July, Tribute to Liberty, a charity raising funds for a new monument in Ottawa to honor the victims of communist regimes, received donations in honor of known fascists and Nazi collaborators through its “buy-a-brick” campaign called Pathways to Liberty, according to press reports. The references to these individuals were removed from the Tribute to Liberty website, but it was unclear whether the donations were returned.

In August, the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center in Canada renewed their calls for removal of two monuments in Edmonton, Alberta that the group said honored Nazi collaborators.

The Tax Court of Canada implemented a policy between October 2020 and May 2021 to ensure no Muslims appeared before Judge David Spiro, according to media reports in September. At the time, Spiro, who is Jewish, was under investigation for allegations of bias in trying to block the hiring of a law professor at the University of Toronto whose academic work criticized Israel for human rights issues in Palestinian territories. Spiro was a major donor to the university. According to Spiro, his opposition to the candidate was because of her affiliation with an organization the government considered terrorist, not because of the candidate’s views on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The Tax Court said it screened counsel and litigants to avoid cases brought by Muslims from being adjudicated by the judge for “perception purposes.” Some members of the legal community, however, opposed the policy, saying it was the equivalent of a “Muslim ban” and was inconsistent with equality in the justice system. According to Mohammad Fadel, a law professor at the University of Toronto, “The policy made it appear falsely as if the complaints against Judge Spiro pitted Jews and Muslims against one another.” In May, a review panel for the Canadian Judicial Council determined that Judge Spiro had made a “serious error” in involving himself in the university hiring decision, but the council recommended no action against him. The Tax Court lifted restrictions on hearings before Spiro in May.

In July, the federal government held separate national summits on antisemitism and Islamophobia. The summits were held to identify ways in which organizations, communities, individuals, and governments could work together to increase public awareness, enhance community security, combat misinformation and online hate, and identify new measures necessary to combat hatred and discrimination based on religion. During both summits, the federal government announced six million Canadian dollars (\$4.7 million) in funding for 150 projects to support communities at risk of hate-motivated crime.

In June, the government of Ontario announced funding for educational programs to help fight anti-Muslim sentiment. It gave grants to the Muslim Association of Canada to create digital resources for educators, students, and parents to counter anti-Muslim sentiment. It also gave grants to the National Council of Canadian Muslims for programs to help Muslim immigrants learn about the country and to prepare Muslim students for school.

In January, the University of Toronto established a working group to create what it termed an inclusive and welcoming environment for Jewish members of the university community and to recommend actions the university could take to improve education about antisemitism.

In July, Mayor Kenny Bell of the Nunavut territorial capital of Iqaluit said he planned to bring forward a motion to the city council to withdraw tax exemptions for churches from municipal property taxes. The mayor said he decided to take the action after publication of the discovery of unmarked graves believed to be of indigenous children at the sites of church-run former Indian Residential Schools. Bell said, “Tax exemptions as a whole are supposed to be for groups that do the community good. It’s very clear that the Catholic Church has not done the community any good.” The mayor subsequently reversed his decision and did not introduce the motion.

According to media reports, in February, RCMP authorities arrested Nationalist Party Leader Travis Patron for “willfully promoting hatred to an identifiable group” after he posted an antisemitic YouTube video, entitled “*Beware the Parasitic Tribe.*” Officially registered in 2019, the Nationalist Party had no members in any legislature.

In July, an article published in the online Jewish newspaper *Algemeiner* entitled “*How Faculty and Teachers Spread anti-Israel Hatred and Anti-Semitism*” included a comment from Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre executive Michael Levitt, who warned of the “mainstreaming of anti-Semitism in Canada.” According to the article, professors at both public and private universities were contributing to an increase in antisemitism on university campuses. For example, the article cited a professor at the University of Victoria who wrote, “Zionist students should not feel welcome in progressive spaces.” The same article stated a professor at the University of Western Ontario, a university with a large Jewish student population, called for a “boycott against Zionist students on campus.”

In April, Prime Minister Trudeau issued a statement on Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, in which he urged Canadians to take time to remember the victims of the Holocaust and to honor its survivors. He said, “Today, and every day, we vow ‘Never again,’ and promise to remain vigilant against antisemitism and all forms of hatred, wherever and whenever they occur.”

In January, then-Minister of Canadian Heritage Steven Guilbeault declared January 29 a National Day of Remembrance of the 2017 Quebec City Mosque Attack and Action Against Islamophobia, to honor the victims and express solidarity with the survivors of the tragedy.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of physical violence, vandalism, hate speech, and harassment directed at religious groups, particularly against Jews and Muslims. In July, Statistics Canada released statistics for 2020 that showed a 16 percent decline in the number of police-reported, religiously motivated hate crimes from 613 in 2019 to 515 in 2020.

In 2020, the most recent year for which there were statistics, the B’nai B’rith Canada League for Human Rights reported nine cases of antisemitic violence, compared with 14 in 2019; there were 118 reports of vandalism, including the painting of swastikas and threatening messages on buildings, and 2,483 reports of harassment, compared with 182 and 2,011, respectively, in 2019. The league received 2,610 reports of antisemitic cases in 2020, compared with 2,207 in 2019 and 2,041 in 2018. More than 95 percent of the occurrences (2,483) involved harassment. Seventy-one percent of all incidents reported in 2020 occurred online or had an online component; the physical location and identities of those posting the online messages were unknown. Occurrences of in-person versus online harassment increased to one in four incidents in 2020. In 2020, while overall incidents increased across the country, there were significant reductions in all provinces except for Ontario and Atlantic Canada, which include New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

Ontario reported more than 1,000 incidents of antisemitism in 2020, a 44 percent increase over the span of a single year and which accounted for 43 percent of all antisemitic incidents in Canada. Atlantic Canada, which historically was the region with the lowest recorded incidents of antisemitism, recorded a rise of more than 226 percent in antisemitic incidents. All incidents in Atlantic Canada were either harassment or vandalism. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice

Statistics, police-reported hate crime data for 2019 indicated that Jews, although only approximately 1 percent of the population, were the targets of 15 percent of all hate crimes in the country and remained the country's most targeted group.

In June, Nathaniel Veltman struck five members of a Muslim family with his truck, killing four of them, in London, Ontario. Police stated the driver fitted his truck bumper with a ram bar and targeted the family because they were Muslim. Authorities arrested Veltman and charged him with one count of terrorism, four counts of first degree murder, and one count of attempted murder. Prime Minister Trudeau condemned the attack as "brutal, cowardly, and brazen" and said the "killing was no accident. This was a terrorist attack." The Prime Minister said he would redouble the government's efforts to dismantle "far-right hate groups" and groups that threatened public safety, adding the government would continue to fund programs to help community centers, religious schools, and places of worship protect themselves.

A preliminary hearing was held in January for Guilherme "William" Von Neutegem, who was charged with first degree murder in the 2020 killing of a congregant in the parking lot of the International Muslim Organization Mosque in Rexdale, a suburb of Toronto. Von Neutegem remained in custody at year's end.

In June, an unidentified man attacked two Muslim women in Alberta, grabbing one of the women by her hijab, pushing her to the ground, and knocking her unconscious, according to media reports. The man reportedly knocked the second woman to the ground and threatened her with a knife. Police opened an investigation and released a sketch of the suspect but made no arrest by year's end.

In March, a woman verbally harassed two Muslim girls, then physically assaulted one of them in Prince's Island Park in Calgary, according to media reports. The assailant reportedly punched one of the victims in the face and kicked her in the stomach. Calgary police charged the assailant with assault, mischief, and causing a disturbance. Dr. Mukarram Zaidi of the Canadian Muslim Research Think Tank said Muslim women and young girls told him, "These kinds of incidents occurred on a daily basis."

According to B'nai B'rith Canada, more antisemitic incidents were reported to the organization in May than in all of 2020, 2019, and 2018 combined. The increase occurred at the same time protests were taking place across the country in response to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. B'nai B'rith Canada stated that incidents of antisemitism also "tend to increase during election campaigns in Canada, whether

federal or provincial.” In August, B’nai B’rith Canada reported unidentified persons vandalized the Beth Sholom Synagogue in Toronto, Ontario with swastikas and other graffiti. A sign drawing attention to antisemitism in Toronto was vandalized with antisemitic rhetoric, and a school in a Jewish neighborhood in Thornhill, Ontario, was painted with swastikas and obscene graffiti. Police opened investigations. Also in August, unknown individuals in Montreal defaced the election signs of two Jewish candidates for the federal parliament with swastikas. Montreal police opened an investigation. In November, unknown vandals defaced the provincial courthouse and neighboring city hall in Ottawa with swastika graffiti and the letters “SS.” Ottawa police opened a hate crime investigation but had made no arrests at year’s end.

According to B’nai Brith, in July, a customer assaulted an elderly Jewish liquor store employee in Toronto after another employee had asked to see the customer’s identification and the customer refused to comply. The customer called the Jewish employee a “dirty [expletive] Jew,” struck him in the back with a wine bottle, and punched him in the face. The victim required stitches and had to take medical leave from work. Authorities arrested a suspect three weeks after the incident and charged him with seven criminal counts. According to B’nai Brith Canada, Toronto police considered it a hate crime.

In May, Jewish and Palestinian groups held parallel demonstrations in central Montreal, and a group of men bearing Palestinian flags attacked a group of Jewish individuals. The men threw stones at the Jewish demonstrators and physically assaulted some of them, according to media reports. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowds.

A June, an Angus Reid Institute poll on racism and diversity found 25 percent of Canadians said they felt “cold” towards Muslims, the highest negative sentiment toward any other religious group described in the survey. A November 2020 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief reported 52 percent of Canadians said they trusted Muslims “a little” or “not at all.”

According to press reports, in January, police charged Adam Riga with threatening to set fire to a place of worship and possession of incendiary materials after one of Montreal’s largest synagogues, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, was vandalized with antisemitic symbols. Large swastikas were painted on the doors of the synagogue and the man brought a canister of gasoline to the site. In February, the judge hearing Riga’s case determined Riga was mentally unfit and could not be

held criminally accountable for his actions and ordered that he be transferred to a psychiatric hospital for treatment.

According to media reports in Vancouver in February, Susan Standfield, characterized as an anti-vaccine conspiracist, promoted a t-shirt online that depicted a yellow Star of David marked with the words “Covid Caust.” B’nai B’rith’s CEO Michael Mostyn condemned Standfield “in the strongest terms” for what he called “trafficking in Holocaust imagery in order to promote COVID-19 conspiracy theories.” He stated, “There can be no comparison between masks and vaccines, which are intended to save lives, and the cruel murder of six million Jews and millions of others by the Nazis and their collaborators.”

In June, unidentified individuals burned four Catholic churches in indigenous communities in suspected arson fires in British Columbia, with two fires set on National Indigenous People’s Day. Police investigated the four incidents. A Catholic church in Nova Scotia was also set on fire in a First Nations (indigenous) community north of Halifax. In July, unknown persons vandalized 11 churches, both Catholic and Protestant, in Calgary, Alberta with red and orange paint, according to media reports. Most of the targeted churches were Catholic, and the vandalism included a smashed window with paint thrown inside, splattered paint over a statue of Jesus Christ, painted handprints on doors, and texts that read “Charge the priest,” “Our lives matter,” and “215.” The paint colors and the number 215 were symbolically linked to protests over the discovery of unmarked graves believed to be of indigenous children compelled to attend Indian Residential Schools. One of the vandalized churches was an African Evangelical Church. According to Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, who condemned the vandalism, many of the church’s congregants had arrived in the country as refugees. Police in Alberta opened an investigation.

An indigenous Manitoba man was arrested in June for setting fire to a Catholic church on Easter Sunday on the territory of the St. Theresa Point First Nation. Several days later, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Ontario was set ablaze, and police opened an investigation. Police said they believed the church fires were likely set as protests after the discovery of 215 unmarked graves believed to be of indigenous children at the sites of former Indian residential schools. Catholic and Protestant religious groups operated most of the schools between 1831 and 1998, and according to media, the government funded them to force the assimilation of Indigenous children into dominant Canadian culture and away from their own native culture and religion. Prime Minister Trudeau commented, “The destruction

of places of worship is unacceptable and it must stop. We must work together to right past wrongs.”

In April, an individual shot an air rifle at the Assahaba Islamic Community Centre in Montreal, according to media reports. Surveillance video showed a hooded individual taking 11 shots at the community center and then running away. The Montreal police hate crimes unit opened an investigation.

In August, an unknown individual vandalized the Komagata Maru memorial in Vancouver. The memorial is dedicated to the 376 Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu passengers aboard the ship *Komagata Maru* that in 1914 was denied entry to Canada under exclusion laws and forced to return to India. Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart said, “This is disgusting and whoever did this is a coward. This memorial is about the perseverance of a community that has helped to build and shape our city.” Vancouver police opened a hate crime investigation that remained pending at year’s end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy, consulate, and other U.S. government officials emphasized with the national and provincial governments the need for respect for religious freedom and diversity and reaffirmed the U.S. government’s commitment to addressing discrimination and exclusion through the Roadmap for Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership, a strategic document of shared policy priorities. Embassy and other U.S. government officials met with representatives from Global Affairs Canada’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion to discuss issues of religious freedom in the country, including religious expression, inclusion, and tolerance. Throughout the year, the embassy and consulates used social media to amplify religious freedom messaging from senior Department of State officials.

In July, a senior embassy official, and in October, the Charge d’Affaires, held roundtables with religious and secular leaders in Quebec City to discuss the relationship between religious freedom and secularism in Quebec. In September, a senior embassy official gave remarks at an event on U.S. support for international religious freedom to graduate students in a Carleton University program on religion and public life. In December, the consulate general in Vancouver participated in a virtual discussion and question and answer session with the British Columbia Muslim Students Association in which students shared their personal and professional experiences working on religious freedom, human rights, and social justice issues. In August, officials from the consulate general in Calgary

hosted a virtual panel on the intersection of identity and religion. The event featured spokespersons from the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths.