

TURKEY 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the country as a secular state. It provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, conviction, expression, and worship and prohibits discrimination based on religious grounds. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), a state institution, governs and coordinates religious matters related to Islam; its mandate is to enable the practice of Islam, provide religious education, and manage religious institutions. According to media, some members of the Uyghur Muslim community expressed fear that the People's Republic of China (PRC) was attempting to pressure the government to change its policy of not deporting members of the Uyghur diaspora community to the PRC. According to media and public government statements, the government generally showed willingness to protect Uyghur Muslims in the country, did not deport any Uyghurs to the PRC during the year, and consistently denied plans to change this policy. In July, media reported nine Kurdish Sunni imams were arrested, charged with terrorism related offenses and for preaching in Kurdish, and then released. The lawyer representing the imams told media he believed his clients' "freedom of religion and belief has been openly violated" because they could not preach in their chosen language. In March, government media regulator Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) fined independent television broadcasters for "insulting society's religious values," which independent Turkish media stated was a common means of retaliation against media organizations critical of the government. In March, the Constitutional Court upheld a regional court decision sentencing a journalist to seven months in prison for tweets "insulting religious values." Government officials continued to use antisemitic rhetoric in speeches. In May, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that Israelis were "murderers, to the point that they kill children who are five or six years old. They are only satisfied with sucking their blood." The government continued to limit the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities, especially those not recognized under the government's interpretation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. Media and nongovernmental organizations reported continued entry bans and deportations of non-Turkish citizen leaders of Protestant congregations. The government continued to restrict efforts of minority religious groups to train their clergy domestically, and the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary remained closed. In January, an Armenian Christian parliamentarian condemned the demolition of a 17th-century Armenian church in Kutahya that had been protected under local law.

Construction of a new Syriac Orthodox church in Istanbul continued, according to the Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Office.

According to media reports, isolated acts of vandalism of places of worship and cemeteries continued. In February, media reported that unidentified individuals vandalized the gate of the Jewish cemetery in Akhisar District of Izmir. According to media, in March, police opened an investigation of a fire set at the gate of the historical Kasturya Synagogue, located in Ayyansaray District in Istanbul. Media reported that three men videotaped themselves dancing atop the gates of Surp Tavakor Armenian Church, causing damage to the gate's crucifix, in Istanbul's Kadikoy District on July 11. Government officials condemned the men's actions; authorities subsequently detained and then released them. In December, the three suspects were indicted and charged with "insulting religious values." Judicial proceedings continued through year's end. In September, media reported unidentified individuals vandalized Kurdish Alevi homes with graffiti that read, "Kurdish Alevi get out," in the province of Mersin. Antisemitic discourse and hate speech continued in social media and the print press; in August, some social media personalities and journalists linked the devastating wildfires spreading through the country to a foreign rabbi living in the country. On June 18, media reported that representatives of the Jewish community filed a criminal complaint against the head of a health and social services business after he tweeted that those protesting at Bogazici University "are all dishonest... You are all a traitor. You are all a Jew."

On October 25, the U.S. President met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. According to the White House press release, they discussed the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The Secretary of State also met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, tweeting afterwards, "We value our partnership with the Orthodox Christian community worldwide and religious minorities in Turkey and the region." The U.S. Ambassador, visiting senior U.S. officials, and other embassy and consulate officials continued to emphasize to government officials the importance of respect for religious diversity and equal treatment under the law. On May 18, the Department of State spokesperson issued a statement condemning President Erdogan's antisemitic rhetoric. U.S. officials urged the government to lift restrictions on religious groups and make progress on property restitution. Senior U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, continued to call on the government to allow the reopening of Halki Seminary and to permit the training of clergy members from all communities in the country. In May, during a visit to Istanbul, the Deputy Secretary of State met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. The Deputy Secretary also visited St. George's Cathedral. Embassy and consulate officials continued to hold meetings with a

wide range of Islamic religious leaders and religious minority community leaders, including those of the Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Alevi, Syriac Orthodox, Baha'i, and Chaldean Catholic communities, to underscore the importance of religious freedom and interfaith tolerance and to condemn discrimination against members of any religious group.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 82.5 million (midyear 2021). According to the Turkish government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, approximately 78 percent of which is Hanafi Sunni. Representatives of other religious groups estimate their members are 0.2 percent of the population, while the most recent public opinion surveys published in January 2019 by Turkish research and polling firm KONDA Research and Consultancy suggest approximately 3 percent of the population self-identifies as atheist and 2 percent as nonbelievers.

Leaders of Alevi foundations estimate Alevi Muslims comprise 25 to 31 percent of the population. KONDA Research and Consultancy estimates the Alevi community at approximately 6 percent of the population, almost 5 million individuals. The Shia Jafari community estimates its members make up 4 percent of the population.

Non-Muslim religious groups are mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities, as well as in the southeast. Exact figures are not available; however, these groups self-report approximately 90,000 Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians (including migrants from Armenia), 25,000 Roman Catholics (including migrants from Africa and the Philippines), and 12,000-16,000 Jews. There are also approximately 25,000 Syrian Orthodox Christians (also known as Syriacs), 15,000 Russian Orthodox Christians (mostly immigrants from Russia who hold residence permits), and 10,000 Baha'is.

Estimates of other groups include 7,000-10,000 members of Protestant and evangelical Christian denominations, 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, fewer than 3,000 Chaldean Christians, fewer than 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians, and fewer than 1,000 Yezidis. There also are small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian Orthodox, Nestorian, Georgian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, and Maronite Christians. The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) estimates its membership at 300 individuals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, conviction, expression, and worship. It stipulates individuals may not be compelled to participate in religious ceremonies or disclose their religion and acts of worship may be conducted freely as long as they are not directed against the “integrity of the state.” The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and exploitation or abuse of “religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion.” It also prohibits “even partially basing” the order of the state on religious tenets.

The constitution establishes the Diyanet, through which the state coordinates Islamic matters. According to the law, the Diyanet’s mandate is to enable the belief, practices, and moral principles of Islam, with a primary focus on Sunni Islam; educate the public about religious issues; and administer mosques. The Diyanet operates under the Office of the President, with its head appointed by the President and administered by a 16-person council elected by clerics and university theology faculties. The Diyanet has five main departments, called high councils: Religious Services, Hajj and Umrah Services, Education, Publications, and Public Relations. While the law does not require that all members of the council be Sunni Muslim, in practice this has been the case.

Blasphemy is outlawed under the penal code, which provides punishment for “provoking people to be rancorous and hostile,” including showing public disrespect for religious beliefs, and criminalizes “insulting values held sacred by a religion.” Insulting a religion is punishable by six months to one year in prison.

The penal code prohibits religious clergy from “reproaching or vilifying” the government or the laws of the state while performing their duties. Violations are punishable by prison terms of one month to one year, or three months to two years if the crime involves inciting others to disobey the law.

Although registration with the government is not explicitly mandatory for religious groups to operate, registering a group is required to request legal recognition for places of worship. Gaining legal recognition of a place of worship requires

permission from the municipalities for the construction or designation of a new place of worship. It is against the law to hold religious services at a location not recognized by the central government as a place of worship; the government may fine or close the venues of those violating the law.

Interfering with the service of a religious group is punishable by one to three years in prison; defacing religious property is punishable by three months to one year in prison; and destroying or demolishing religious property is punishable by one to four years in prison. Because it is illegal to hold religious services in places not registered as places of worship, in practice, these legal proscriptions apply only to recognized religious groups.

The law prohibits Sufi and other religious-social orders (*tarikats*) and lodges (*cemaats*), although the government generally does not enforce these restrictions.

Military service is obligatory for males; there is no provision for conscientious objection. A government policy allows individuals to pay a fee of 43,151 Turkish lira (\$3,300) instead of performing full military service; however, they are required to complete a three-week basic training program. Those who oppose mandatory military service on religious grounds may face charges in military and civilian courts and, if convicted, could be subject to prison sentences ranging from two months to two years.

The leadership and administrative structures of religious communities do not have a legal personality, leaving them unable to directly buy or hold title to property or press claims in court. Communities rely on separate foundations or associations governed by individual boards to hold and administer assets and property.

A 1935 law prohibits the establishment of foundations based on the religion or ethnicity of members but grants exemptions to foundations existing before the enactment of the law. Non-Muslim citizens direct these longstanding foundations; 167 continue to exist, the majority of which are associated with the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish communities. In practice, a religious group formed after 1935 may successfully apply to register as an association or foundation provided its stated objective is charitable, educational, or cultural rather than religious. There are six Protestant foundations (four existing before the passage of the 1935 foundation law), 36 Protestant associations, and more than 30 representative offices linked with these associations.

The General Directorate of Foundations (GDF), under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, regulates the activities and affiliated properties of all foundations, and it assesses whether they are operating within the stated objectives of their organizational charter. There are several categories of foundations, including religious community foundations existing prior to the 1935 law.

If a foundation becomes inactive, the government may petition the courts to rule it is no longer operational and transfer its assets to the state. Only a court order may close a foundation of any category, except under a state of emergency, during which the government may close foundations by decree.

A foundation may earn income through companies and rent-earning properties, as well as from donations. The process for establishing a foundation is lengthier and more expensive than that for establishing an association, but associations have fewer legal rights than foundations at the local level.

Several religious communities have formally registered corresponding associations. Associations must be nonprofit and receive financial support only in the form of donations. To register as an association, a group must apply to the provincial governor's office with supporting documentation, including bylaws and a list of founding members. A group must also obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior as part of its application if a foreign association or nonprofit organization is a founding member; if foreigners are founding members of the group, the group must submit copies of its residence permits. If the governorate finds the bylaws unlawful or unconstitutional, the association must change them to meet the legal requirements. Under the law, the governorate may fine or otherwise punish association officials for actions deemed to violate the organization's bylaws. A court order may close an association, and the Ministry of Interior may temporarily close an association or foundation and apply to a court within 48 hours for a decision on closure. Otherwise, the government may close associations and foundations by decree under a state of emergency. The civil code requires associations not to discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race.

By law, prisoners have the right to practice their religion while incarcerated; however, not all prisons have dedicated places of worship. According to the law, prison authorities must allow visitation by clergy members of registered religions and allow them to offer books and other materials that are part of the prisoner's faith as long as the prisoner is a member of a registered religion.

The constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public and private schools at all levels starting with fourth grade, with content determined by the Ministry of National Education's Department of Religious Instruction, which falls under the authority of the Office of the President. Religion classes are two hours per week for students in grades four through 12. Only students who marked "Christian" or "Jewish" on their national identity cards may apply for an exemption from religion classes. Atheists, agnostics, Alevis or other non-Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Yezidis, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Confucians, Taoists, and Buddhists, or those who left the religion section blank on their national identity card are rarely granted exemptions from the classes. Middle and high school students may take additional Islamic religious courses as electives for two hours per week during regular school hours.

The government issues chip-enabled national identity cards that contain no visible section to identify religious affiliation. The information on religious affiliation is recorded in the chip and remains visible to authorized public officials as "qualified personal data" and protected as private information. Previously issued national identity cards, which continue in circulation, contain a space for religious identification with the option of leaving the space blank. The new cards include the same options for religious identities as the older cards: Muslim, Greek Orthodox, non-Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, "no religion," or "other/unknown." Baha'i, Alevi, Yezidi, and other religious groups with known populations in the country were not options, requiring individuals of other religions or no religion to leave the category blank or to state "other/unknown."

According to labor law, private and public sector employers may not discriminate against employees based on religion. Employees may seek legal action against an employer through the Labor Court. If an employee can prove a violation occurred, the employee may be entitled to compensation of up to four months of salary in addition to the reversal of the employment decision.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with one reservation regarding Article 27, which states individuals belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities "shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language." The reservation asserts the right "to interpret and apply the provisions of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the related provisions and rules of the Constitution of the

Republic of Turkey and the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 and its Appendixes.”

Government Practices

On July 4, a court sentenced Syriac Orthodox priest Father Bilecen (also known as Father Aho) to 25 months in prison for “aiding a terrorist organization.” According to the Province of Mardin Public Prosecutor, local gendarmerie arrested Aho and two other Syriacs in 2018 for providing bread and water to members of the U.S.- and Turkish-designated terror organization Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) who visited the 1,500-year-old Mor Yakub Monastery in Mardin Province. According to Aho, he provided food and water to the individuals in question because his religion “commanded” him to help others, stating he acted “out of my belief, not out of help to any organization.” The case was pending appeal at year’s end.

On July 11, media reported nine Kurdish Sunni imams were arrested, charged with terrorism-related offenses, and then released seven days later. Authorities detained the nine imams along with 19 others during a counterterrorism operation. Media reported the charges for arrest also included preaching sermons in Kurdish. The nine imams were reportedly asked why they had deviated from the mandatory Diyanet-approved Friday sermon (*khutbah*) and why they delivered the sermon in Kurdish. While by law the Diyanet’s mandate is to govern and coordinate all matters of Islamic practices, teachings, and beliefs, the law does not forbid preaching in Kurdish. The lawyer representing the imams told media that he believed his clients’ “freedom of religion and belief has been openly violated,” since they were not able to practice in their chosen language. One of the imams told media, “God gave us this language.” According to media, authorities released the imams under travel restrictions. The case continued through the year’s end.

The country continued to host a large diaspora community of ethnic Uyghur Chinese Muslims. The PRC continued to seek the forcible repatriation of some Uyghur Muslims from Turkey; however, local Uyghur community sources said they knew of no cases of deportations of Uyghurs to the PRC during the year. During the year, members of the Uyghur community expressed concern regarding an extradition treaty the government signed with the PRC in December 2020. By year’s end, lawmakers had not debated or ratified the treaty. According to media and public government statements, the government generally showed willingness to protect Uyghur Muslims in the country, did not deport any Uyghurs to the PRC during the year, and consistently denied plans to change this policy. According to

media, Uyghur individuals whom police detained in counterterrorism security raids and subsequently released expressed fear that they were targeted because of PRC pressure on the country. During Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's March visit to Ankara, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told media he "conveyed [their] sensitivity and thoughts on Uyghur Turks."

In March, the Constitutional Court ruled a lower court had infringed on journalist Hakan Aygun's rights following his arrest for a March 2020 social media post in which he used a religious pun to criticize a government Twitter campaign soliciting donations; authorities freed Aygun in May 2020. The Constitutional Court awarded him compensation of 40,000 lira (\$3,100) for his wrongful arrest. His case with the local court that sentenced him to seven months and 15 days in prison for "insulting the religious values adopted by a section of the population" was pending appeal at year's end.

Also in March, government media regulator RTUK fined independent television broadcasters Halk TV and TELE1 for "insulting society's religious values," which independent media stated was a common means of retaliation against media organizations critical of the government. In another case, RTUK fined TELE1's program "18 Dakika" (18 Minutes) for using the term "Islamic terrorism" on its program.

In March, the government announced its Human Rights Action Plan, to be implemented within two years and which included several reforms for religious minority communities, including provisions to hold General Directorate of Foundation elections. Elections, however, were not held by year's end, and the plan did not become law. Representatives from religious groups reported no change in interactions with the government following the plan's announcement.

The government continued to interpret the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which refers broadly to "non-Muslim minorities," as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognized groups: Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. The government continued not to recognize the leadership or administrative structures of non-Muslim minorities, such as the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and Chief Rabbinate, as legal entities, leaving them unable to buy or hold title to property or to press claims in court. These three groups, along with other minority religious communities, had to rely on independent foundations they previously organized, overseen by separate governing boards, to hold and control individual religious properties.

According to a Seventh-day Adventist source, during the year, the government compensated at least one of six Seventh-day Adventist adherents for its refusal to allow the Seventh-day Adventists to establish a foundation. The source said the compensation was in line with a European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) 2010 ruling that found the government had violated the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides for freedom of assembly and association, when the government refused to allow the establishment of the foundation. The court ruling required the government to pay six members of the congregation in Istanbul a total compensation of 8,724 euros (\$9,900).

The Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate continued to seek legal recognition, and their communities operated as conglomerations of individual religious foundations.

In December, media reported Archbishop of Armenian Catholics in Turkey Levon Zekiyani led the first Mass in Surp Hovsep Armenian Catholic Church in Diyarbakir in nearly a century. The building had been damaged during clashes between police and Kurdish demonstrators in the city in 2015. Restored by the General Directorate of Foundations, the church will be used by Dicle University for 10 years as a cultural center under the condition that the Armenian Catholic community retain the right to use the church on demand.

In September, media reported the Assyrian community, with bureaucratic assistance from the GDF, reopened Mor Dimet Church in the southeast province of Mardin after 30 years of inactivity. The church was abandoned in the height of tensions in the region in 1980s and early 1990s.

On August 15, for the first time in six years, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, whom the government continued not to recognize as the leader of the world's approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians, presided over the Divine Liturgy at Sumela Monastery. This was the second time the government granted the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate permission to hold its annual August 15 service at the fourth-century monastery since suspending services in 2015 for restoration. During the liturgy, the Patriarch thanked President Erdogan and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for allowing the ceremony to take place and for caring for the space.

According to media reports, in January, the private owner demolished the 17th century Church of Surp Toros in the eastern province of Kutahya. Although the

place of worship had been deconsecrated and abandoned since 1915, Garo Paylan, an Armenian Christian member of parliament for the opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), condemned the act. Although used as a film set and a wedding hall, the centuries-old former Armenian church had been classified as an "immovable requiring protection" by the Kutahya Regional Board of Cultural Heritage Protection. Paylan stated authorities remained indifferent to the Armenian community's calls for the church's restoration or, at least, its use as a cultural center, and he referred to a statement by President Erdogan that there would be no interference with the belief or worship of anyone.

On August 10, Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy presented 12 recovered icons stolen from local historical churches to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in a ceremony held at the Canakkale Troy Museum in the northwestern part of the country. The 12 artifacts, including depictions of Jesus, Christian saints, and a crucifix, were reportedly stolen from several historical churches on Bozcaada (Tenedos) Island in the Aegean Sea. Ersoy said the items were recovered in a multinational antismuggling operation that seized more than 4,000 items before they left the country. Ersoy emphasized the government's determination to combat trafficking in antiquities and cultural artifacts.

In August, media reported the restoration of Surp Yerrortutyun Armenian Church (known in Turkish as Uc Horan) in Malatya was complete. The building, which will serve as both a church and a cultural center, hosted its first Mass in decades on August 29. The Malatya Metropolitan Municipality financed part of the restoration.

Multiple Protestant church representatives continued to report bureaucratic difficulties in registering places of worship. According to the Protestant Church Association headquartered in Ankara, it did not attempt to register any church during the year, and it reported no progress on the fewer than 10 registration requests it had made in previous years. Church representatives said they were obliged to continue meeting in unregistered locations for worship services because local officials did not approve registration applications and continued to impose zoning standards on churches, including minimum space requirements of at least 10,764 square feet, a requirement generally not imposed on mosques. Officials did not apply this requirement to Sunni Muslim congregations, which they permitted to build worship facilities in malls, airports, and other smaller spaces. Additionally, some Protestant churches reported local authorities did not allow them to display crosses on the exterior of their buildings.

The government continued in larger prisons to provide incarcerated Sunni Muslims with *mesjids* (small mosques) and Sunni preachers. Alevi and non-Muslims did not have clerics from their own faiths serving in prisons; however, clergy of other religious groups were permitted to enter prisons with the permission of the public prosecutor to minister to their adherents as long as doing so was not considered a threat to a facility's security.

The government continued to treat Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim "sect" and did not recognize Alevi houses of worship (*cemevis*), despite a 2018 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals that *cemevis* are places of worship. In March 2018, the head of the Diyanet had said mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevi and Sunni. On February 14, Istanbul Sariyer District municipal authorities, after eight years of deliberation, denied house of worship status to Imam Huseyin Cemevi in Sariyer District without providing a justification.

On June 18, media reported the country's first museum dedicated to Alevi culture, ritual, and practices and affiliated with the provincial government opened in Tunceli, a Kurdish majority city located in the eastern part of the country.

On February 18, the Council of State, the country's highest administrative court, ruled to stop a project of the Ministry of Environment and Tunceli Governorship to develop Munzur Springs, considered sacred by the Alevi community, in eastern Tunceli Province. Alevi community members and human rights groups had strongly opposed the eight million lira (\$617,000) project, which planned to develop the springs into a tourist recreation area. Lawyers representing the community filed the lawsuit with the Council of State in August 2020.

The GDF continued its restoration of the Surp Giragos Armenian and Mar Petyun Chaldean Churches, both in Sur District, Diyarbakir. During the year, the government again did not pay restitution and compensation to the religious groups for the expropriation of property damaged in fighting with the PKK.

During the year, the government did not return properties seized in previous decades; it last returned properties in 2018, specifically 56, to the Syriac community. Representatives from various communities said they continued to pursue property returns through appropriate legal and government channels. The Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Jewish, Syrian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox, Chaldean, and Armenian Protestant communities, which had previously submitted applications for the return of properties, continued to report these unresolved claims were an issue for their communities. Due to their

legal status, recognized religious foundations remained eligible to receive compensation for their seized properties, but religious institutions and communities without legally recognized foundations were not.

Many public buildings, including universities, continued to maintain small mosques. In 2017, the Ministry of National Education issued a regulation requiring every new school to have an Islamic prayer room. The government continued to deny Alevi the right to establish similar places of worship in government buildings that did not contain places of worship for non-Sunnis. Alevi leaders reported the approximately 2,500 to 3,000 cemevis in the country were insufficient to meet demand. The government continued to state that Diyanet-funded mosques were available to Alevi and all Muslims, regardless of their school of religious thought.

News outlet *T24* reported on April 16 that a middle school teacher in Amasya was under investigation for his answer regarding a question about the Prophet Muhammad. According to the report, during a class on fighting addictions, a student asked the teacher's opinion about the Prophet sleeping two hours during the day. The teacher commented that such habits change over time and depend on many factors. The student's parents, after learning about the conversation, filed a complaint that resulted in an investigation over whether the teacher's comments insulted religious values because they believed the teacher had indirectly questioned a behavior of the Prophet Muhammad. The teachers' union *Egitim-Sen* described the incident as an example of the pressures and intimidation teachers faced. The case was ongoing at year's end.

Religious communities, particularly Alevi Muslims, continued to raise concerns regarding several of the government's education policies. At year's end, the government continued not to comply with a 2013 ECtHR ruling that found the government's compulsory religion courses in public schools violated educational freedom. The ECtHR denied the government's appeal of the ruling in 2015 and upheld the Alevi community's legal claim that the government-mandated courses promoted Sunni Islam and were contrary to Alevi religious convictions. Authorities added material on Alevism to the religious course curriculum in 2013 after the ECtHR decision, but Alevi groups stated the material was inadequate and, in some cases, incorrect, and that teachers often ignored it. They continued to call on the government to implement the ECtHR decision.

Non-Sunni Muslims and nonpracticing Muslims said they continued to face difficulty obtaining exemptions from compulsory religious instruction in primary

and secondary schools and often had to choose from electives dealing with different aspects of Sunni Islam, particularly if their new identification cards listed their religion as Muslim. Reportedly, because only Christian and Jewish children could opt out of the religion course, teachers assumed all other students were Muslim and thus required to take the course. The government said the compulsory instruction covered a range of world religions, but some religious groups, including Alevis and members of Christian denominations, stated the courses largely reflected Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and contained negative and incorrect information about other religious groups, such as some educational texts referring to Alevi beliefs as mysticism. In June 2019, the Istanbul 12th Regional Administrative Court accepted an Alevi parent's appeal for his son's exclusion from the compulsory religious course. The case was still pending at year's end.

The country's education materials in mandatory religion classes were discriminatory against religions other than Islam, according to a March study within the "Project for Supporting Diversity and Freedom of Religion and Faith in Turkey's Education System." The project was cosponsored by the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and with support from the Dutch embassy. The project aims to contribute to the harmonization of legislation and practice in Turkey in accordance with international human rights standards by producing information through human rights-based monitoring of the right to freedom of religion or belief in schools. According to the study, the curriculum did not include teachings about non-monotheistic faiths and only referred to Christianity and Judaism briefly in the context of their followers in the Arab Peninsula before the emergence of Islam. The report also stated that some of the expressions in the curriculum were so biased that they effectively disrespected other religions, noting a phrase that read, "The only religion accepted by God is Islam."

The government continued to provide funding for public, private, and religious schools teaching Islam. It did not do so for minority schools the government recognized under the Lausanne Treaty, except to pay the salaries for courses taught in Turkish, such as Turkish literature. The minority religious communities funded all the schools' other expenses through donations, including from church foundations and alumni.

Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish religious community foundations continued to operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education. Children of undocumented Armenian migrants and Armenian refugees from Syria could also attend. Because the government continued to

classify legal migrant and refugee children as “visitors,” they were ineligible to receive diplomas from these schools. The curricula of these schools included information unique to the cultures of the three groups and teachable in the minority groups’ languages.

During the year, media reported that parents continued to protest the conversion of Ismail Tarman Middle School into an *imam hatip* school, a vocational religious school to train government-employed imams. In 2020, the parents petitioned to stop the conversion of the school. While the parents successfully argued that five imam hatip schools were already available in their district and four courts – two local administrative and two regional administrative courts – ruled in their favor to prevent the conversion, the Ministry of National Education did not adhere to the court decisions and the school continued to operate as an imam hatip school.

Several Alevi foundations again requested the end of a continuing program that takes school children ages six to 13 to local mosques for religious instruction during their two-week winter break. The voluntary Ministry of National Education program, begun in 2018 for 50,000 children drawn from each of the 81 provinces, continued for a fourth year.

On September 21, media reported a religious studies teacher at Martyr Ali Ihsan Okatan Secondary School in Ankara’s Mamak District was under investigation for remarks he made in the classroom. According to the reports, the teacher asked Alevi students to identify themselves, then asked, “Why don’t Alevis pray? Why don’t Alevis fast?” The reports also stated that he said, “We do not like Ali.” Ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson Omer Celik said the case was being investigated. On the floor of parliament, opposition party Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) Istanbul Deputy Zeynel Ozen called for the teacher to be dismissed. The National Ministry of Education issued a statement saying, “An investigation has been initiated by our ministry regarding the alleged incident between a religious culture and ethics teacher and some students in a district of Ankara. The process is being followed closely.” There were no further developments by year’s end.

According to press reports, in his October meeting with President Biden, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I raised the importance of the Turkish government allowing Halki Seminary to reopen as an independent institution to again enable the training of Greek Orthodox clergy in the country. As of year’s end, there were no further developments concerning the plan to open an Islamic educational center on the same island (Halki) as the shuttered seminary. A 1971

Constitutional Court ruling prohibited the operation of private institutions of higher education and led to the Halki Seminary's closure. Amendments to the constitution in 1982 allowed for the establishment of private institutions of higher education but also placed significant restrictions on these institutions, and the Halki Seminary was not permitted to reopen and operate under its traditions and preferences.

The government continued to provide training for Sunni Muslim clerics while restricting other religious groups from training clergy inside the country. The Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates remained unable to train clergy within the country.

Multiple reports continued to state Protestant communities could not train clergy in the country and therefore relied on foreign volunteers to serve in leadership capacities. Local Protestant communities stated they aimed to develop indigenous Turkish leaders in their congregations because it was becoming increasingly difficult to rely on foreign volunteers. Several Protestant clergy, including evangelical Christian pastors, conducted religious services while resident in the country on long-term tourist residence permits.

Protestant community sources also said some of the deportations and entry bans during the year targeted foreign citizen members of the community who had lived legally as long-term residents in the country for decades and who previously had not experienced any immigration difficulties. According to community members, these immigration procedures also affected a local community's ability to raise funds for local churches because foreign clergy members attracted individual donations and support from church communities in their countries of origin. Some individuals with entry bans or resident permit denials requested review of their immigration status through the country's legal system. None of the cases reached conclusion by year's end and could take several years to resolve due to the complexities of, and backlog in, the judicial system, according to media reports.

Monitoring organizations and media outlets, including Middle East Concern, International Christian Concern, World Watch Monitor, Mission Network News, and Voice of the Martyrs, continued to report entry bans, denial of residency permit extensions, and deportations for long-time residents affiliated with Protestant churches in the country. In 2019, the Ministry of Interior's Directorate for Migration Management announced that as of January 1, 2020, the government would deny extension requests to long-term residents for tourist purposes in the absence of another reason to request a residency permit (i.e., marriage, work,

study). Observers reported that at year's end, there were 41 pending immigration court cases, including residency permit denials and entry bans, of which 20 were new cases. Observers reported there were at least two dozen evangelical Christian residence permit court cases pending as of year's end, including eight at the Constitutional Court level. Recipients of bans and denials most frequently cited security codes that denoted "activities against national security" and "work permit activities against national security." While similar measures occurred in previous years, multiple groups said they perceived a stagnation in the number of removals and entry bans during the year.

In August, media associated with the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) reported concerns about the situation of evangelical Christians in the country, including deportations and reentry bans. In its March report to the UN Human Rights Committee, WEA said, "Since 2019, there has been a systematic campaign to label foreign Protestants as security threats. None of the Christians denied permits or expelled has been convicted of committing any specific crimes."

In February, media reported that a foreign pastor, along with the NGO Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF), filed an application with the European Council on Human Rights accusing the government of religious persecution for the pastor's 2018 deportation and subsequent reentry ban for publicly evangelizing in the streets of Istanbul. According to media and ADF, the pastor was not allowed to reenter Turkey in 2018, where he had lived for 19 years.

The Armenian-Turkish newspaper *Agos* reported in March that an Ankara administrative court ruled a 2013 government circular cancelling elections for boards of minority religious foundations was illegal, and the government appealed the ruling. The last foundation board election was held in 2011. During the year, members of religious communities continued to report they were still unable to hold elections for the governing boards of their foundations, which remained an impediment to managing their affairs. They said when board members died, retired, or left the country, foundation boards had a more difficult time fulfilling their duties and ran the risk of eventually not functioning without new members. Religious communities expressed concern that if boards reached the point of no longer functioning, the government could then declare the foundation defunct and transfer its properties and other assets to the state.

The government continued not to recognize Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I as the leader of the world's approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians, consistent with the government's stance that there was no legal obligation for it to

do so. The government's position remained that the Ecumenical Patriarch was only the religious leader of the country's Greek Orthodox minority population. The government continued to permit only Turkish citizens to vote in the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Holy Synod or be elected patriarch, and it continued its practice of granting citizenship to Greek Orthodox metropolitans under the terms of the government's 2011 stopgap solution intended to widen the pool of candidates eligible to become the next patriarch. The government continued to maintain that leaders of the Greek Orthodox (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, and Jewish communities must be Turkish citizens.

The decision by the Church of Jesus Christ to remove its volunteers and international staff from the country remained in effect throughout the year. In 2018, the Church cited safety concerns as the reason for the removal. According to local members, some followers stayed away from church because they feared retribution and discrimination. Some said they had lost their jobs, including in the public sector, because of their faith, and they experienced difficulties in finding new employment.

The government paid partial compensation to the Alevi Cem Foundation in lira, based on the 2017 euro exchange rate, amounting to 39,010 euros (\$47,900) after the ECtHR rejected the country's appeal to reduce the 54,400-euro (\$66,700) compensation it was obligated to pay the Alevi Cem Foundation in February 2019. The Cem Foundation filed a court case to receive the remainder of compensation and interest. The case continued at year's end. The Cem Foundation took the government to the ECtHR in 2010 for discrimination for not paying the electric bills of Alevi places of worship, a service provided for mosques. The government appealed for a fee reduction to 23,300 euros (\$28,600). In November 2018, the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled cemevis were places of worship and therefore should receive the same benefits as Sunni mosques, including being exempt from paying utility bills. Alevi organizations continued to call on the government to comply with the ruling.

The Diyanet continued to regulate the operation of all registered mosques, and it paid the salaries of Sunni personnel. The government did not pay the salaries of religious leaders, instructors, or other staff belonging to other religious groups.

On July 24, the first anniversary of the Hagia Sophia's (known as Ayasofya in the country) reconversion from a museum to a mosque, Diyanet head Ali Erbas led prayer in the building. Originally the principal church of the Byzantine Empire, the Hagia Sophia became a mosque in 1453 and then a museum in 1935. In July,

UNESCO stated its “grave concern” about the reconversion, specifically how it might impact the “Outstanding Universal Value of the property.” It also said it “deeply regrets the lack of dialogue and information” concerning the government’s change in the status of the Hagia Sophia and Kariye (also known as Chora) Museum. UNESCO requested the government submit a report by February 2, 2022 “on the state of the conservation of the property.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in response that ministry officials were in contact with UNESCO since the very beginning of the process in an “open and undisrupted” manner. The ministry said UNESCO’s concern was “biased,” and that the usage of the Hagia Sophia and the Kariye Museum was a matter for the country alone to decide. The ministry emphasized that the country would protect the monuments’ “historical, cultural, and spiritual value.”

The opening of the Chora Museum as a mosque did not occur by the end of the year because of continuing restoration. Announced to open in October 2020 as a mosque, the museum, famed for its mosaics and frescos depicting Christian imagery, was originally constructed and repeatedly renovated as the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Savior in the fifth century and then converted into the Kariye Mosque in 1511 before becoming a museum in 1945.

The government continued to permit annual and other commemorative religious worship services at religiously significant Christian sites previously converted to state museums, such as St. Peter’s Church in Antakya, St. Nicholas’ Church near Demre, St. Paul Church near Isparta, the Church of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island, and the House of the Virgin Mary near Selcuk.

The trial of 13 individuals charged with conspiracy to commit a large-scale assault on an Izmit Protestant church and kill its pastor in 2013 continued through year’s end. Reportedly, the delay in the trial was in part attributable to the alleged involvement of security forces in the assault.

On April 14, media reported the Suspicious Deaths and Victims Association’s findings that said 80 percent of those who died while conscripted in the military were either of Alevi or Kurdish origin. The association’s chief, Riza Dogan, estimated that between 2000-2020, more than 3,000 conscripts had died. The association is comprised of relatives of the deceased conscripts.

The government continued to provide land for the construction of Sunni mosques and to fund their construction through municipalities. According to the Diyanet’s most recent published statistics, there were 89,445 Diyanet-operated mosques in

the country in 2020, compared with 89,259 Diyanet-operated mosques in 2019. Although Alevi groups were able to build some new cemevis, the government continued to decline to provide financial support for their construction and maintenance, with some instances of municipalities providing this support.

Construction of a new Syriac Orthodox church, Mor Efrem, in Istanbul was delayed, but work continued, with completion expected in spring 2022. Once completed, it will be the first newly constructed church since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The approximately 18,000-member Syriac Orthodox community in Istanbul continued to use churches of other communities, in addition to its one existing historic church, to hold services.

During the year, the government allocated 350,000 lira (\$27,000) for religious minority publications, including newspapers, compared with no funding in 2020.

Jewish citizens again expressed concern about antisemitism and security threats. According to members of the community, the government continued to coordinate with them on security issues. They said the government measures were helpful and the government was responsive to requests for security.

On March 28, during a meeting in Diyarbakir with Islamic NGOs, Diyanet President Ali Erbas said, “Let’s protect our children from ideologies other than Islam and various organizations and structures that promote disbelieving, atheism, deism, and Zoroastrianism.” The Atheism Association subsequently sued Erbas for putting the lives of nonbelievers in danger and “inciting hatred and enmity in the public.” The case continued through year’s end.

During the year, President Erdogan and other government officials, including Diyanet officials, made public remarks toward religious minorities that these minorities considered insulting, including antisemitic remarks, in official rhetoric. In May, President Erdogan stated that Israelis were “murderers, to the point that they kill children who are five or six years old. They are only satisfied with sucking their blood.” Also in May, Mufti Saban Soytekinoglu in the western province of Duzce said that most Greek immigrants from Thessaloniki were not Muslims but “secret Jews.” He also accused Jews of having orchestrated 2013 Gezi Park protests against the proposed urban development plan for the park.

According to media reports, on February 9, Dr. Ahmet Seref Demirel, a medical doctor at the public Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine, was sentenced to eight months in prison for telling his Alevi patient during a medical exam that “All

Alevis are terrorists.” His sentence was in accordance with a penal code article on inciting public hatred.

In December, President Erdogan issued a statement wishing a Happy Hanukkah to the country’s Jewish citizens and said, “Our region has for thousands of years been a home to different cultures, all of which are very valuable.” He emphasized that everyone should be able to “practice their beliefs and traditions freely without any discrimination, regardless of their religion, language, or ethnic origin.” Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu issued a statement on social media wishing the Jewish residents of Istanbul a Happy Hanukkah. Also in December, the Jewish community in Istanbul held its first outdoor menorah-lighting ceremony, at which Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva spoke to a crowd of nearly 200 persons, including government officials and district mayors.

On March 27 and September 6, President Erdogan sent messages to the Jewish community celebrating Passover and Rosh Hashanah. The messages described unity as well as cultural and social diversity as one of the country’s most important assets and recognized the contributions of Jews “to develop, strengthen, and attain the goals” of the country. In April, he released an Easter message stating, “Sharing our Christian citizens joy on Easter, I strongly believe that such features of ours as unity and solidarity, which form the basis of our nation, will forever be passed on from one generation to another.”

Renovations continued on the Etz Hayim Synagogue in Izmir, scheduled to reopen in early 2022 as both a synagogue and a museum. According to Izmir Jewish community leaders, the synagogue, plus several other Jewish sites nearby, would form part of a “Jewish Museum” project, some of which still required reconstruction. The project received funding from the municipal government and through international grants.

In May, President Erdogan hosted an iftar at the Presidential Palace during Ramadan with the leaders of the main minority religious groups, including Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Jewish, Assyrian, Roman Catholic, and other minority religious groups, to discuss issues such as a potential new constitution and the process of returning properties of minority foundations.

On January 27, the Directorate of Communications of the Presidency launched the website weremember.gov.tr, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and the Rwanda, Cambodia, and Srebrenica genocides. Government statements highlighted the country’s history of helping Jews escape Nazi

persecution, its status as a cosponsor of the 2005 UN resolution designating January 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and they noted the country's resolute stance "against these hate-based phenomena and all kinds of discrimination," including antisemitism. In February, the government for the sixth consecutive year commemorated the nearly 800 Jewish refugees who died aboard the *Struma*, a ship that sank off the coast of Istanbul in 1942. The governor of Istanbul, Chief Rabbi Haleva, other members of the Jewish community, and members of the diplomatic community attended the commemoration.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were continued media reports of vandalism of places of worship and cemeteries, including a growing number of instances of vandalism of Christian cemeteries. On July 12, media reported three men videotaped themselves dancing atop the gates of Surp Tavakor Armenian Church in Istanbul's Kadikoy District on July 11, causing damage to the gate's crucifix. Police detained all three before releasing them. In December, the three suspects were indicted and charged with "insulting religious values." President Erdogan condemned the incident, saying "We will monitor the case until the end. It is not possible to tolerate such indecency, impertinence." Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu termed the act "disrespectful." Soylu and Istanbul Governor Ali Yerlikaya called Armenian Patriarch Sahak Masalyan to express sympathy and assure him the perpetrators would be punished.

In January, authorities arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to a 16-month prison term the individual who in May 2020 tore the cross from the gate of the Armenian Surp Krikor Lusaravic Church in Kuzguncuk District, Istanbul.

In April, International Christian Concern reported the looting, including removal of frescoes, of a Byzantine-era Greek Orthodox church in Samsun.

On January 24, media reported unidentified individuals vandalized five Alevi homes in Yalova with "Alevi" graffiti painted in red. On August 27, media reported Alevi homes in Adana were marked with x's. On September 11, media reported unidentified individuals vandalized Kurdish Alevi Muslim homes in the province of Mersin, writing graffiti that read, "Kurdish Alevi get out."

Some news outlets published conspiracy theories involving Jews. In August, some social media personalities and journalists linked devastating wildfires spreading through the country to a foreign rabbi living in the country. Media outlets also

continued to blame the country's economic difficulties and the genesis and spread of COVID-19 on Jews.

On June 18, media reported that representatives of the Jewish community had filed a criminal complaint against the head of a health and social services business after he tweeted that those protesting at Bogazici University "are all dishonest... You are all a traitor. You are all a Jew." The case was pending at year's end.

According to Jewish community representatives, confronting hateful discourse through print and social media was the most effective way to combat antisemitism. They said antisemitic messages and hate speech in social and print media were pervasive and often went unquestioned. They added that societal hostility toward Jews sometimes manifested in acts of vandalism directed at Jewish places of worship and cemeteries. In February, media reported unidentified persons vandalized the gate of the Jewish cemetery in Akhisar District, Izmir. According to media, in March, police opened an investigation on a fire set at the gate of the historical Kasturya Synagogue, located in the Ayvansaray District in Istanbul. The Kasturya Synagogue was built in 1893 and demolished by unknown individuals in 1937 after Jews living in the neighborhood left the country. Only the historical gate remained. There were no developments in the investigation by year's end.

According to media, in May, unidentified individuals hacked the website of *Salom*, the sole newspaper serving the Jewish community. Authorities had not apprehended the hackers by year's end. According to media reports, the social media site Clash Report, which usually posts about armed conflict, said Jews were "overrepresented in the Biden cabinet."

On January 28, media reported the Armenian Catholic Surp Krikor Lusavoric Church in Bursa Province was for sale by an unidentified private seller. According to media, after the Armenian genocide in 1915, the church passed into private hands. Spiritual leader of Armenian Catholics Levon Zekiyani told media his community "cannot afford to buy the church." By year's end, the property had not been sold.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

On October 25, the President met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I at the White House. According to the White House press release, they discussed the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right as well as efforts to confront climate change and steps to end the global COVID-19 pandemic. The

Secretary of State also met with the Patriarch, tweeting afterwards, “We value our partnership with the Orthodox Christian community worldwide and religious minorities in Turkey and the region.”

The Ambassador, other embassy and consulate general officials, and visiting U.S. officials regularly engaged with government officials throughout the year, including at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss religious freedom issues, including religious education. They underscored the importance of religious freedom, interfaith tolerance, and equal treatment under the law, and of condemning hateful or discriminatory language directed at any religious groups. They sought government representatives’ responses to specific claims of religious freedom concerns raised by local religious communities and explored how best to collaborate between the governments of the two countries to protect and respect religious freedom.

On May 18, the Department of State spokesperson issued a statement condemning President Erdogan’s antisemitic rhetoric for his comments criticizing Israel during the spring clashes Israel and Hamas.

U.S. government officials urged the government to implement reforms aimed at lifting restrictions on religious groups and raised the issue of property restitution and restoration. Embassy staff continued to press for the restitution of church properties expropriated in Diyarbakir and Mardin. Senior U.S. government officials continued to urge government officials to reopen the Greek Orthodox seminary in Halki and allow all religious communities to train clergy in the country. On July 29, the Department of State spokesperson stated, “Today marks 50 years since the Turkish Constitutional Court ruled that all institutions of higher education must either nationalize or close, resulting in the closure of the Theological School of Halki, a seminary of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Halki Seminary had operated for 127 years, and its closing deprived the Ecumenical Patriarchate of a training school for Orthodox clergy in Turkey, its home for 1,690 years. Since Halki’s closure, those wishing to become Orthodox clergy have been forced to go abroad for their training. The United States continues to urge the Turkish government to respect the right to freedom of religion or belief as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and allow the reopening of the Halki Seminary. Moreover, we call upon the government of Turkey to allow all religious groups to again train their clergy within the country.”

In May, during a visit to Istanbul, the Deputy Secretary of State met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and underscored the U.S. commitment to religious freedom. The Deputy Secretary also visited St. George's Cathedral.

During his October 25 meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Secretary of State reaffirmed that the reopening of the Halki Seminary remained a continued priority for the U.S. government.

Senior U.S. embassy, consulate general, and consulate officials regularly engaged virtually and to the extent possible in-person with a wide range of religious community leaders to hear and address their concerns, including religious foundation elections, education, and property, and to promote interreligious dialogue. Officials from the embassy and consulates general engaged with members of the Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christian, Armenian Protestant, Armenian Catholic, Protestant, Alevi, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Roman Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, and Church of Jesus Christ religious groups, among others, throughout the country and throughout the year.

In August, high level embassy officials visited Hagia Sophia (known as Ayasofya Mosque) and found Orthodox Christian figurative art and iconography in the nave of the edifice remained covered, including outside of prayer times. In November, embassy officials visited the Etz Hayim Synagogue in Izmir, where they talked with local Jewish community leaders about restoration progress on several historic synagogues. In August, officials of the consulate general in Istanbul traveled to the city of Edirne, where they met with members of the local Baha'i community and visited Muslim, Jewish, and Bulgarian Orthodox historical sites. In November, officials from the consulate general in Istanbul traveled to Bursa where they met with representatives of the Protestant and Jewish communities. In conjunction with International Religious Freedom Day, embassy officials and officials from the consulate in Adana met with minority religious groups and majority Sunni faith leaders in Hatay on October 19, including representatives of the Arabic-speaking Patriarchate of Antioch Greek Orthodox foundation, the Roman Catholic Church, a Protestant (Korean Methodist-founded) congregation, and the Sunni Habibi Neccar Mosque. They also visited the Turkish-Armenian village of Vakifli. On October 20 in Iskenderun, officials from the consulate in Adana met with the head of the Hatay Jewish community and a Roman Catholic priest at the Cathedral of the Annunciation. In all meetings, U.S. government officials emphasized the U.S. government's commitment to religious freedom and respect for religious diversity.

The embassy and consulates general used Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to emphasize the importance of the inclusion of religious minorities, including messages under hashtags such as #DiniOzgurluk (religious freedom), on designated days that recognized and underscored the U.S. government commitment to religious freedom and human rights.