

# BELGIUM 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the law prohibits discrimination based on religious orientation. Federal law bans covering one's face in public.

During the year, the Flanders regional government withdrew the recognition of four mosques; no new mosques were recognized. In April, in a case brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses to the European Court of Human Rights, the court decided that the Witnesses experienced unfair taxation and that this had a "not insignificant and a considerable impact." Wallonia and Flanders retained their ban on the slaughter of animals without prior stunning, which Muslim and Jewish groups criticized for infringing on halal and kosher practices. On June 17, the Brussels Regional Parliament voted against a legislative proposal that would have banned animal slaughtering without stunning. Brussels remained the only one of the country's three regions where ritual slaughter – animal slaughter following kosher and halal procedures – can take place. The Belgian Buddhist Union remained unrecognized as a religious group despite an announcement by the ruling coalition in 2020 of its intent to do so.

Several incidents took place involving Jews, including insults, harassment, or physical assaults, mainly in the Antwerp Jewish Quarter. In July, private Jewish patrols reported that two individuals near an Antwerp synagogue shouted antisemitic slogans at Jewish individuals. The situation escalated into violence, with a perpetrator kicking a member of the Jewish community and taking his watch. Police arrested one individual but the second fled the scene.

U.S. embassy officials met regularly with senior government officials in the Office of the Prime Minister; at the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Justice; and with members of parliament to discuss anti-Muslim and antisemitic incidents and discrimination. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with civil society and religious leaders in Brussels and other communities to address anti-Muslim and antisemitic incidents and sentiment and to advocate religious tolerance. In October, the embassy hosted the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism for four days to discuss religious freedom and antisemitism

in the country. The Ambassador published an op-ed calling for appointing a full-time National Coordinator on Antisemitism and encouraged senior government officials to create this position and office. The embassy continued to fund a nongovernmental organization (NGO) project educating high school students from varied backgrounds on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to break down stereotypes and combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the country.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 11.8 million (midyear 2022). According to the most recent survey in 2018 by the GESIS-Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, 57.1 percent of residents are Roman Catholic, 20.2 percent “nonbeliever/agnostic,” 9.1 percent atheist, 6.8 percent Muslim (mostly Sunni), 2.8 percent other non-Orthodox Christian, 2.3 percent Protestant, 0.6 percent Orthodox Christian, 0.3 percent Jewish, 0.3 percent Buddhist, and 0.5 percent “other.” A 2015 study by the Catholic University of Louvain estimated that 42.2 percent of Muslims reside in Flanders, 35.5 percent in Brussels, and 22.3 percent in Wallonia. According to Catholic University of Louvain sociologist Jan Hertogen, based on 2015 data, 24.2 percent of the Brussels population and 7.5 percent of the Antwerp population are Muslim.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides for freedom of worship, including its public practice, and freedom of expression, provided no crime is committed in the exercise of these freedoms. It states no individual may be required to participate in any religious group’s acts or ceremonies or to observe the group’s religious days of rest, and it bars the state from interfering in the appointment of religious clergy or blocking the publication of religious documents. It obligates the state to pay the salaries and pensions of clergy (according to law, to qualify clergy must work in recognized houses of worship and be certified by those religious groups), as well as those of representatives of organizations recognized by the law as providing moral assistance based on a nonconfessional philosophy.

The law prohibits discrimination based on religious or philosophical (e.g., nonconfessional) orientation. Federal law prohibits public statements inciting religious hatred, including Holocaust denial. Discrimination based on Jewish descent is distinguished from discrimination against Jewish religious practices. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is one year in prison. Courts have interpreted that an antiracism law that prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, skin color, ancestry, national origin, or ethnicity may be applied to cases of antisemitism.

The government officially recognizes Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Anglicanism (separately from other Protestant groups), Orthodox (Greek and Russian) Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and secular humanism.

The law does not define requirements to obtain official recognition. The Ministry of Justice specifies the legal basis for official recognition. A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then recommends approval or rejection to parliament, which votes on the application. The government evaluates whether the group meets organizational and reporting requirements and applies criteria based on administrative and legislative precedents in deciding whether to recommend granting recognition to a religious group. The religious group must have a structure or hierarchy, a “sufficient number” of members, and a “long period” of existence in the country. It must offer “social value” to the public, abide by the laws of the state, and respect public order. The government does not formally define “sufficient number,” “long period of time,” or “social value.” Final approval is the sole responsibility of the federal parliament; however, parliament generally accepts the ministry’s recommendation.

The law requires each officially recognized religious group to have an official interlocutor, such as an office composed of one or more representatives of the religion plus administrative staff, to support the government in its constitutional duty of providing the material conditions for the free exercise of religion. The functions performed by the interlocutor include certification of clergy and teachers of the religion, assistance in the development of the religious curriculum in schools, and oversight of the management of houses of worship.

The federal and regional governments provide financial support for officially recognized religious groups. Federal government subsidies include direct payment of clergy salaries and pensions, while regions subsidize maintenance and equipment costs for facilities and places of worship, as well as clergy housing, and oversee finances and donations when the legal exemption amount is exceeded. Denominations or divisions within the recognized religious groups (Shia Islam, Reform Judaism, or Lutheranism, for example) do not receive support or recognition separate from their parent religious group. Parent religious groups distribute subsidies according to their statutes, which may also include salaries to clergy and public funding for renovation or facility maintenance. Unrecognized religious groups may worship freely and openly but do not receive the subsidies that recognized groups do. In addition, the law stipulates a separate federal government subsidy for three organizations: the Belgian Muslim Executive (BME), the Secular Central Council, and the Belgian Buddhist Union. Although the Buddhist Union receives this separate subsidy, the government has not officially recognized Buddhism as a religious group. It is not illegal for religious organizations to receive foreign funding; however, recognized places of worship will lose recognition and government subsidies if their organization receives foreign funding. Unrecognized places of worship have no funding restrictions, but if they wish to be recognized, they must renounce foreign funding.

There are procedures for individual houses of worship of recognized religious groups to apply to obtain recognition and federal subsidies. To do so, a house of worship must meet requirements set by the region in which it is located and receive final approval by the federal Ministry of Justice. These requirements include transparency and legality of accounting practices, renunciation of foreign sources of income for ministers of religion working in the facility, compliance with building and fire safety codes, and certification of the minister of religion by the relevant interlocutor body. Recognized houses of worship also receive subsidies from the linguistic communities and municipalities for the upkeep of religious buildings. Houses of worship or other religious groups that are unable or choose not to meet these requirements may organize as nonprofit associations and benefit from lower taxes but not government subsidies. Individual houses of worship in this situation (i.e., not completing the recognition process) may still affiliate with an officially recognized religious group.

The Flemish government imposes enhanced security screening for possible radicalization of imams, other religious leaders, or worshippers and against foreign influence at mosques and other places of worship. The government requires all religious communities and places of worship to complete a four-year probation period prior to official recognition. This policy applies to all places of worship regardless of religion.

There is a federal ban on covering one's face in public. Individuals wearing face coverings that cover all or part of the face in public are subject to a maximum fine of €137.50 (\$150). In addition, the penal code stipulates violators may be sentenced to a maximum of seven days' imprisonment.

The Walloon and the Flemish regions prohibit the slaughter of animals without prior stunning. In Brussels, the regional parliament voted against a draft bill imposing a similar ban on June 17. The legislation does not prevent halal and kosher meat from being imported from abroad.

By longstanding practice rather than law, the government bans the wearing of religious symbols by employees in public sector positions requiring interaction with the public. The ban does not apply to teachers of religion in public schools.

The constitution requires teaching in public schools to be neutral with respect to religious belief. The public education system requires neutrality in the presentation of religious views outside of religion classes. All public schools offer religious or philosophical instruction oriented toward citizenship and moral values. Outside of Flanders, these courses are mandatory; parents in schools in Flanders may have their children opt out of such courses. Francophone schools offer a mandatory one-hour per week philosophy and citizenship course plus an additional one-hour mandatory course on either philosophy and citizenship or one of the recognized religions, based on a constitutional court ruling.

Schools provide teachers, clerical or secular, for each of the recognized religious groups, as well as for secular humanism, according to the student's preference. The degree of religious expression varies but must follow a principle of "neutrality." Because "neutrality" is not defined explicitly in the constitution in the context of religious expression, most state-funded institutions follow one of two principles: "inclusive neutrality," where individuals must remain neutral in

their behavior but may wear religious symbols, or “exclusive neutrality,” where there is a total ban on religious attire. In either case, education provided outside of the religious classes must remain neutral.

Public school religion teachers are nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the linguistic community government’s Education Minister. Private, authorized religious schools (limited to schools operated by recognized religious groups), known as “free” schools, follow the same curriculum as public schools but may place greater emphasis on specific religious classes. Teachers at these religious schools are civil servants, and their salaries, as well as subsidies for the schools’ operating expenses, are paid for by the respective linguistic community, municipality, or province.

Unia is the publicly funded, independent agency responsible for reviewing discrimination complaints, including those of a religious nature, and attempting to resolve them through mediation or arbitration. The agency lacks legal powers to enforce resolution of cases but may refer them to the courts.

The Federal Justice Minister appoints a magistrate in each judicial district to monitor discrimination cases and oversee criminal prosecutions, including those involving religion.

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

### **Government Practices**

During the year, Flanders’ regional government withdrew the recognition of four mosques. According to Minister of Justice Van Quickenborne, mosque applications for government recognition continued to decline due to ongoing mismanagement by the leadership of the BME and an unfinished internal restructuring of the organization, as well as denials of some mosques’ applications following review by intelligence services. Observers reported that some mosques opted not to seek official recognition because they received sufficient foreign funding, primarily from Morocco and Turkey, and preferred to operate without government oversight. Others stated the lengthy, bureaucratic process of obtaining recognition also acted as a deterrent.

During the year, the Flemish government continued to accept applications for recognition by religious houses of worship that then regional Interior Minister Liesbeth Homans suspended in 2017. In 2021, the Flemish government enacted a new decree reorganizing the recognition process for local religious organizations. The decree contained several conditions for a mosque in Flanders to be recognized by authorities (and to receive subsidies); the main ones include prohibition from receiving funding from a foreign country and from having imams paid by a foreign country. Additionally, any request for recognition could only be granted after a four-year process and a thorough screening. In May, Flemish Minister for Home Affairs Bart Somers regretted that Diyanet (the Turkish institution meant to administer affairs related to faith and worship of Islam) opposed the new recognition decree cutting religious communities off from foreign influence by taking the Flemish recognition decree to the Constitutional Court. Somers added that the Turkish ambassador unsuccessfully attempted to intervene in the drafting of the decree.

According to Flemish government officials an estimated 50-100 local places of worship had applications for recognition that remain pending, some dating back to the 2017 moratorium on mosques recognition, pending the new Flemish decree (mentioned above) detailing the security and screening requirements applicable to local communities of recognized religions requesting local recognition. In the province of Antwerp alone, 31 mosques continued to wait for a decision on official recognition.

During the year, local media and academics reported that recognition applications by eight mosques remained pending. The mosques filed these applications in 2021 in the Brussels-Capital region.

There were 89 recognized mosques, according to the website of the BME: 39 in Wallonia, 24 in Flanders, and 26 in Brussels. The BME estimated there were a total of 300 mosques in the country, both recognized and unrecognized.

An application from the Belgian Hindu Forum for the government to recognize Hinduism as a religion, submitted in 2013, remained pending, as did its application to receive a government subsidy. There were no other pending requests by religious groups.

In April, in a case brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses to the European Court of Human Rights, the court decided that the Witnesses experienced unfair taxation and that this had a "not insignificant and considerable impact." The Witnesses argued that legislation enacted in 2017 in the Brussels Region amending the tax code to limit property tax exemptions was discriminatory and contrary to the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights on discrimination related to thought, conscience, and religion as well as property. The government countered that the Witnesses could apply for federal recognition to continue to claim the exemption in the Brussels Region, to which the Witnesses replied that it would be pointless to apply, given what they said were the serious shortcomings in the procedure for doing so.

In June, the Ghent Appellate Court ruled that Jehovah's Witnesses' practice of limiting or avoiding contact with former followers, also called shunning, was legal and did not incite discrimination, segregation, hatred, or violence. The ruling vacated a 2021 ruling of the Ghent Correctional Court against the Kraainem Jehovah's Witness congregation, finding it guilty of inciting discrimination and inciting hatred or violence against former members of the congregation and fining it €12,000 (\$12,800). The Ghent prosecutor filed a criminal case against the group in 2020 following a five-year investigation based on a complaint by a former member of the congregation, Patrick Haeck, who said he had been shunned after he exposed a case of sexual abuse, leaving him completely socially isolated.

In January 2021, media reported that the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, Sammy Mahdi, said he had ordered a Turkish imam to leave the country within 30 days for making homophobic remarks. The man, who was the imam of the Green Mosque in the Flemish municipality of Houthalen-Helchteren and a member of the Belgian branch of the Turkish religious authority Diyanet, reportedly posted the comments on the mosque's and his personal Facebook pages. Mahdi stated that the imam's comments could incite hate and "harm public order or national security" and refused to renew his residence permit. On April 23, Mahdi's cabinet confirmed via a press release that the imam had left Belgium. In response, Flemish Minister for Civic Integration Somers began procedures to remove the recognition of the mosque due to what he said were discriminatory messages against the LGBTQI+ community on its Facebook page. At year's end, the government continued to recognize the mosque but placed it under scrutiny.



A large slaughterhouse performing kosher and halal slaughter continued to operate in Brussels, where slaughter without prior stunning remained permitted, but it could not accommodate all requests, particularly during religious holidays. The Brussels government said it had no policy on animal slaughter without prior stunning.

On June 17, the Brussels Regional Parliament voted against a legislative proposal that would have banned animal slaughtering without stunning. Drafted by the Brussels DeFI, Flemish Greens (Groen), and Open VLD parties, the committee rejected the first proposal on June 8 in a committee vote with six votes in favor, six votes against, and three abstentions. Following the committee's rejection, the proposal went to a plenary session, where it failed with 42 votes opposing, 38 in favor, and eight abstentions. With Wallonia having passed a ban in 2018 and Flanders in 2019, Brussels remains the only one of Belgium's three regions where ritual slaughter – animal slaughter following kosher and halal procedures – can take place.

In July, the Ghent Chamber of Indictments ruled that Dries Van Langenhove and six other members of the far-right organization *Schild en Vrienden* (Shield and Friends) must face official charges of racism and spreading hate speech contained in an online chat room, including antisemitic, anti-Muslim comments. Their trial was pending at year's end. The public prosecutor's office originally opened an investigation in 2018 after public broadcaster VRT documented antisemitic, anti-Muslim, xenophobic, racist, and sexist messages exchanged by the members in an online chat room.

In September, the Brussels Court found the federal government, represented by Minister of Justice Van Quickenborne, liable for illegally meddling in the activities of the BME. The court stated that the government had not properly documented accusations against Echallaoui and that Van Quickenborne's statements violated the neutrality of the State. Van Quickenborne's government originally revoked the official recognition of the BME, rendering it ineligible for public subsidies. Van Quickenborne stated that the revocation would incentivize the BME to implement the reforms that the government had long been demanding if the BME wished to regain access to yearly €500,000 (\$534,000) per year of federal funding; those reforms include more transparency, inclusivity (including for women) and elections (not appointments) for the body's leadership.

The court awarded Echallaoui €5,000 (\$5,300) in damages; Van Quickenborne stated he would appeal the ruling. In 2020, Van Quickenborne had advocated for the dismissal of then Executive Chairman Salah Echallaoui, accusing him of spying for the Moroccan government. Echallaoui resigned in 2021, but vehemently denied the allegations and filed a complaint.

On October 13, the Luxembourg-based Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that employers in the EU can ban the wearing of headscarves if the banning is general and does not discriminate against employees. In its decision in the case concerning a Muslim woman whom a Belgian company told that she could not wear the headscarf, the court ruled that "the internal rule of an undertaking prohibiting the visible wearing of religious, philosophical, or spiritual signs does not constitute direct discrimination if it is applied to all workers in a general and undifferentiated way."

Police continued to offer a voluntary, day-long course, "The Holocaust, the Police, and Human Rights," at the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen, site of a Holocaust museum and memorial.

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

During the year, media and NGOs, including Amnesty International, the Collective against Islamophobia in Belgium, the NGO Antisemitism Belgium, and Unia, reported incidents of violence, threats, harassment, discrimination, and hate speech against Muslims and Jews.

On April 30, Uccle (Ukkel) residents found graffiti with the word "Jew" in black paint near a dental office. Officials removed the paint; the mayor of Uccle, Boris Dillières, stated it was an "unspeakable act" and confirmed that an investigation was ongoing.

In April, according to website *antisemitisme.be*, witnesses observed a man on a street in Antwerp screaming at Jewish worshippers leaving a synagogue after services on Shabbat. When the man tried to physically attack one of the responders, security guards stopped him.

In July, private security services reported that two individuals near an Antwerp synagogue shouted antisemitic slogans at Jewish individuals. The situation escalated into violence, with a perpetrator kicking a member of the Jewish community and taking his watch. Police arrested one individual; the second fled the scene.

In September, private security services reported that an intoxicated woman shouted antisemitic and profane language toward Jewish pedestrians, while in the Antwerp Jewish neighborhood. She later emerged from her home holding a knife. Local private security forces intervened and restrained the woman. No information on any criminal charges filed against the woman was available at year's end.

In December, the Litigation Council of the Belgian Foreigners' Office rejected Imam Hassan Iquioussen's urgent appeal against his November 15 notification of expulsion from the country. The Council ruled that Iquioussen had no legal basis for the appeal. The Moroccan imam had lived and worked in France for years despite having renounced his French citizenship, and was subject to a French deportation order because of his extremist and discriminatory rhetoric. Iquioussen fled to the country at the of end August, where officials arrested him for his extended illegal presence in the country. Since evading a deportation order is not illegal in the country, however, Belgian judicial authorities refused to repatriate the imam to France. Morocco, meanwhile, is unlikely to accept any request by Iquioussen to return there.

In June, the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research made available a two-year study conceptualized as an index that ranks a composite of measures of factors affecting Jewish life in 12 European Union countries. The scores are based on multiple subjects, including the Jewish sense of security, public attitudes to Jews, and the number of Jews who said they'd experienced antisemitism. The index also considered government policies regarding antisemitism, including funding for Jewish communities, adoption of a set definition of antisemitism, and the status of Holocaust education and freedom of worship. The authors derived the information for the scores from major opinion polls in recent years, including those conducted by the Action and Protection League. The country with the highest index score of 79 had the most antisemitic incidents, while Belgium had the lowest index score of 60. Regarding the scores, Rabbi Menachem Margolin,

chairman of the European Jewish Association, added "[this score] does not mean that the state is doing its best to ensure the development of the Jewish community. Belgium, for example, is a country where residents are generally satisfied, but if you delve into the details, you'll see that the country does the minimum for the preservation of Jewish life compared to other European countries."

In 2021, the most recent period for which data were available, Unia reported 81 antisemitic incidents, a 29.6 percent decrease from 2020. Unia defined these as incidents against Jewish persons rather than against Jewish practices, which it tracked separately. Of these, 66 percent were related to hate speech and 49 percent took place on the internet. Unia reported cases of destruction of public property and cases of verbal harassment related to antisemitism. No cases of physical assault or attacks were on record.

Unia reported 243 cases of other religious discrimination or harassment in 2021, a 7 percent decrease from 2020. Of the 2021 incidents, 20 percent were media related, and 35 percent occurred in the workplace, approximately 77 percent of the cases were against Muslims. There were 186 attacks against Muslims, 11 incidents against Jewish religious practices, four against Christians, and 36 in which the religious link was categorized as "other" or "unclear."

The Aalst Carnival, which in previous years had open antisemitic and anti-Muslim displays, took place in February on a much smaller scale due to COVID restrictions. Media outlets did not report discriminatory or offensive displays at the carnival in 2022.

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

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom and anti-Muslim and antisemitic sentiment in meetings with representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister; the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Justice; regional government officials; and members of the federal and regional parliaments.

Embassy officials regularly met with religious leaders to discuss incidents of religious discrimination and ways to counter public manifestations of anti-Muslim

and antisemitic sentiment. They continued engagement with activists from the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

Embassy officials met with various university professors from the Universite Libre de Bruxelles to discuss the animal slaughter ban outside of Brussels and its effect on Muslim and Jewish communities, the veil in public schools and institutions, and the process for recognition of mosques and imam training in the country.

The embassy engaged with the Antwerp Jewish community's head of private security and with Antwerp municipal government officials and police to ensure the continued protection of the Jewish community as responsibility shifted from the military to local police forces.

In the lead-up to the Brussels parliament vote in June to ban ritual slaughter, the Ambassador and embassy officials met with leaders of five political parties and the country's Jewish and Muslim communities to express U.S. government concerns about the proposed ban on ritual slaughter in Brussels. The Ambassador engaged the two political party presidents, one from the coalition and one from the opposition, to express his concerns about the negative implications a ban could have on the Jewish and Muslim Community. Embassy staff engaged the drafters of the slaughter without stunning legislation to encourage amending the legislation to include an exception to produce halal and kosher meat.

In March, the embassy organized virtual visits consisting of five separate meetings for the Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism to express concerns about the proposed ban on ritual slaughter. The Deputy Special Envoy and embassy officials participated in meetings that included Federal Representative (parliamentarian) and Jewish community leader Michael Freilich, head of the Israelite Consistory Phillipe Markiewicz, drafter of the ritual slaughter bill from the Defi party Jonathan de Patoul, President of the Forum of Jewish Organizations of Antwerp Philippe Scharf, and Muslim Scholar Radouane Attiya.

In May, the Ambassador discussed religious freedom during a roundtable in Antwerp with the Forum of Jewish Organizations of Antwerp and expressed concerns over the proposed ban on ritual slaughter.

In June, the Ambassador visited a Jewish school, a Holocaust memorial, and during a roundtable with religious leaders and some members of federal and regional parliaments, underscored the U.S. commitment to religious freedom.

In October, the embassy hosted the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism for four days to discuss religious freedom and antisemitism in the country. The Special Envoy met with a federal member of parliament and participated in two separate roundtables, one with the Forum of Jewish Organizations in Antwerp, and one with the directors of the Kasserne Dossin Museum alongside the Belgian Federal police, the Auschwitz Foundation, and the NGO A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe.

The Special Envoy also held a roundtable discussion with the U.S. embassy community to discuss combatting all types of discrimination, including religious discrimination.

The Ambassador hosted a 40-person working dinner for the Special Envoy to discuss lessons learned from her meetings in the country and recommendations for how to combat antisemitism with members of the federal and regional government, lawyers, students from the Jewish Student Association, the director of the BME, various ambassadors, prominent members of the Jewish and Muslim community, and embassy personnel.

In November, the Ambassador published an op-ed calling for the appointment of a full-time National Coordinator on Antisemitism. After publication, the Ambassador engaged State Secretary for Equal Opportunities, Gender Equality, and Diversity Sarah Schlitz to discuss the importance of creating this full-time position in the government that addresses combatting antisemitism.

The embassy continued to work with Actions in the Mediterranean, a Brussels-based NGO, focused on educating 40 high school students and teachers from various schools and socioeconomic backgrounds on the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tensions in the relationship between religious communities in Belgium that arise from that conflict, as well as antisemitic and anti-Muslim sentiment. The NGO partners with public and private schools to ensure diversity within the group and students are nominated by their teachers for the program based on merit. The program, in its seventh year, included a tour

of Israel and Palestinian areas for one week, with the goal of breaking down stereotypes and learning ways to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment upon returning home. Upon return, students received public speaking training and shared their experiences with students at other schools.