

# JORDAN 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution declares Islam the religion of the state but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination based on religion. It does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. According to the constitution, matters concerning the personal and family status of Muslims come under the jurisdiction of sharia courts. Under sharia, converts from Islam are still considered Muslims and are subject to sharia but are regarded as apostates.

Converts to Islam from Christianity and to Christianity from Islam continued to report security officials questioning them regarding their religious beliefs and practices as well as some instances of surveillance. Converts to Christianity from Islam reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their “true” religious beliefs and practices. The Ministry of Awqaf [religious endowments], Islamic Affairs, and Holy Places (MOA) continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary not approved by the government. The government continued to deny official recognition to some religious groups, including Baha’is and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Members of some unregistered religious groups continued to face problems registering their marriages and the religious affiliation of their children and in renewing their residency permits. Some religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Throughout the year, King Abdullah publicly met with leaders from various Christian denominations, including those from Protestant denominations not granted official recognition.

Some converts to Christianity from Islam continued to report ostracism as well as physical and verbal abuse from their families and communities, and many worshipped in secret due to the social stigma they faced. Some converts reported persistent threats of violence from family members concerned with protecting traditional honor. Atheists and some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Converts from Christianity to Islam also reported social stigma from their families

and Christian society. Christian women married to Muslim men were more often stigmatized. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination. Religious leaders reported continued online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and moderates, frequently through social media. Some social media users defended interfaith tolerance, with posts condemning content that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue. Observers continued to report friction between Christian denominations that were recognized by the government and those that were not. Several Jewish travelers reported antisemitic practices, such as confiscation of religious items by border authorities at ports of entry. The state-affiliated al-Rai news outlet published several articles containing antisemitic content or denials of the Holocaust. In October, the Catholic Center for Studies and Media and the American University in Madaba hosted dozens of students from various universities in the country for a workshop on using social media to promote interfaith harmony.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including with the MOA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and Royal Hashemite Court, to raise the issues relating to the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith tolerance. Embassy officers also engaged with Muslim scholars, Christian community leaders and members, and representatives of unrecognized religious groups to promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue. The embassy supported programs promoting religious tolerance, as well as civil society programs seeking to preserve the cultural heritage of religious minorities.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 11 million (midyear 2022). According to U.S. government estimates, Muslims, virtually all of whom are Sunni, make up 97.1 percent of the population, while Christians make up 2.1 percent. Church leaders' estimates of the size of the Christian community range from approximately 1.8 percent to as high as 3 percent of the country's population. Groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, and Druze (who are considered Muslims by the government). According to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS), there is also a small community (consisting of a few migrant families) of Zoroastrians and Yezidis.

Most of the more than one million migrant workers in the country are from Egypt, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia are often Christian or Hindu. There are an estimated 743,000 refugees and other displaced persons registered with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from approximately 50 countries of origin, including more than 661,000 Syrians, 62,000 Iraqis, 12,000 Yemenis, and 5,000 Sudanese. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates that there are 2.4 million Palestinians registered with UNRWA in the country, the majority of whom have Jordanian nationality. The government states there are 1.3 million Syrians present in the country. The Syrian and Iraqi refugee populations are mostly Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims and Christians account for less than one-third of the Iraqi refugee population.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution declares Islam “the religion of the state” but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites,” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion and states the King must be a Muslim. The constitution allows for religious courts, including sharia courts for Muslims and ecclesiastical courts for Christian denominations recognized by the government. According to the General Iftaa Department, the office charged with issuing religious guidance in the form of fatwas, sharia courts follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence in adjudicating personal status cases.

The constitution does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. The constitution and the law, allow sharia courts to determine civil status affairs for Muslims; these courts do not recognize converts from Islam to other religions. Under sharia, converts from Islam and their children are considered Muslim apostates and are still subject to sharia. Neither the penal code nor the criminal code specifies a penalty for apostasy. Sharia courts have jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and individuals declared to be apostates may have their marriages annulled or be disinherited, except in the case of a will that states otherwise. Any member of

society may file an apostasy complaint against such individuals before the Sharia Public Prosecution. The Sharia Public Prosecution consults with the Council of Church Leaders (CCL), a government advisory body comprising the heads of the country's 11 officially recognized Christian denominations, before converting a Christian to Islam to make sure the conversion is based on religious conviction and not for purposes of marriage or divorce.

The penal code contains articles criminalizing acts such as incitement of hatred, blasphemy against Abrahamic faiths, undermining the regime, or portraying citizens in a manner that violates their dignity. The penal code criminalizes insulting the Prophet Muhammad, punishable by one to three years' imprisonment. Written works, speeches, and actions intended to cause or resulting in sectarian strife, including conflicts between religious groups, are punishable by one to three years' imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 200 Jordanian dinars (\$280). The law also provides a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding 20 dinars (\$28) for anyone who publishes anything that offends religious feelings or beliefs and for anyone who speaks within earshot of another person in a public space and offends that individual's beliefs.

Authorities may prosecute individuals who proselytize Muslims under the penal code's provisions against "inciting sectarian conflict" or "harming the national unity." Both offenses are punishable by imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to 200 dinars (\$280).

Islamic religious groups are granted recognition through the constitution and do not need to register with the government. Non-Islamic religious groups must obtain official recognition through registration. If registered as "denominations," they may administer rites such as marriage and establish ecclesiastical courts. Recognized religious groups may also own land, open bank accounts, and enter into contracts. Religious groups may alternatively be registered as "religious entities." Religious entities must work through ecclesiastical courts of recognized denominations on matters such as divorce and inheritance, but they otherwise have all other rights as recognized denominations, such as conducting marriages, owning property, and opening bank accounts. Members of Christian churches recognized under the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations as well as members of denominations registered as religious entities, may take their

denomination-issued marriage certificates to the Civil Status Bureau to receive their government marriage certificates. Recognized denominations and religious entities generally did not need government approval to accept funding from parent churches or certain Christian charities or organizations based outside of the country. Recognized non-Islamic religious groups are tax-exempt but do not receive the government subsidies granted to Islamic religious groups.

Religious groups not recognized as denominations or religious entities lack legal status and may not undertake basic administrative tasks such as opening bank accounts, purchasing real estate, or hiring staff. Individuals may exercise such activities on behalf of the unrecognized group, however. To register as a recognized religious denomination, the group must submit its bylaws, a list of its members, its budget, and information regarding its religious doctrine to the Ministry of Interior and Prime Ministry. In determining whether to register or recognize Christian groups, the Prime Minister confers with the Ministry of Interior and the CCL. Although the practice is not explicitly mandated by law or the constitution, church and government leaders have stated that the CCL must endorse recognition for new Christian groups prior to the Prime Minister's approval. To achieve official recognition as denominations, Christian groups must be recommended by the Ministry of Interior and approved by the cabinet. The government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian groups: the group's teachings must not contradict the nature of the constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches, a regional body comprising four families of churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant/Evangelical), must recognize it; its religious doctrine must not be antagonistic to Islam as the state religion; and the group's membership must meet a minimum number of citizens, although a precise figure is not specified.

An annex to the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations lists 11 officially recognized Christian religious groups: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Anglican, Maronite Catholic, Lutheran, Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Coptic. In 2018, five additional evangelical Christian denominations, formerly registered under the Ministry of Justice, were recognized by the Ministry of Interior as religious entities but not as religious denominations and, as a result, none have been permitted to establish an ecclesiastical court: the Free Evangelical Church, Church of the

Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptist Church. Religious groups such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah's Witnesses are not registered and gather in semi-official or unofficial meetings places. The government improved the ability of the Church of Jesus Christ to operate by granting it legal status as a charitable association through its Latter-day Saint Charities in 2018 and permitted members to gather in semi-official meeting spaces owned by the charity. However, the government required Church of Jesus Christ members to obtain marriage certificates through officially recognized Christian denominations and did not allow the Church of Jesus Christ to independently own buildings or establish bank accounts.

The CCL serves as an administrative body to facilitate tax and customs exemptions, as well as to issue civil documents related to marriage or inheritance. In other matters, such as issuing work permits or purchasing land, the denominations interact directly with the relevant ministries. Religious groups that do not have representatives on the CCL handle administrative tasks through the ministry relevant to the task. Unrecognized Christian groups do not have representatives on the CCL, have no legal status as religious entities, and must have individual members of their groups conduct business with the government on their behalf. The Greek Orthodox Archbishop permanently chairs the presidency of the CCL.

Under constitutional amendments that took effect on February 1, the King appoints and can dismiss, without consulting the cabinet, the chief justice, the head of the Sharia Judicial Council, the Grand Mufti, and senior royal court officials.

According to the constitution, a special provision of the law regulates the activities and administration of finances of the Islamic awqaf. Per this provision of the law, the Ministry of Awqaf manages mosques, appoints imams, pays mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain mosque-sponsored activities, such as holiday celebrations and religious observances. Other Islamic institutions are the General Iftaa Department, which issues fatwas; the Supreme (Sharia) Justice Department, headed by the Office of the Supreme (Sharia) Justice (OSJ) and in charge of the Sharia Public Prosecution; the Sharia Courts; and the Sharia Institute.

The government requires imams to adhere to officially prescribed themes for Friday sermons. Muslim clergy who do not follow government policy may be suspended, issued a written warning, banned from delivering Friday sermons for a certain period, or dismissed from the Ministry of Awqaf. In addition to these administrative measures, a preacher who violates the law may be imprisoned for a period of one week to one month or given a fine not to exceed 20 dinars (\$28).

The law forbids any Islamic cleric from issuing a fatwa unless authorized by an official committee headed by the Grand Mufti in the General Iftaa Department. This department is independent from the Ministry of Awqaf, with the rank of Grand Mufti being equal to that of a government minister.

The law prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult “founders of religion or prophets” or that are deemed contemptuous of “any of the religions whose freedom is protected by the constitution,” and it imposes a fine on violators of up to 20,000 dinars (\$28,200). The government’s Media Commission regulates the publishing and distribution of all books and media. If the Media Commission deems passages “violate public norms and values, are religiously offensive, or are insulting to the King,” it can ban the entry and distribution of the book in the country.

By law, public schools provide Islamic religious instruction as part of the basic national curriculum; non-Muslim students are allowed to opt out. Private schools may offer alternative religious instruction. The constitution provides “congregations” (a term not defined in the constitution, but which, according to the legal code, includes religious groups recognized as denominations and entities) the right to establish their own schools, provided “they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to the control of government in matters relating to their curricula and orientation.” To operate a school, religious institutions must receive permission from the Ministry of Education, which ensures the curriculum meets national standards. The ministry does not oversee religious courses if religious groups offer them at their places of worship. In several cities, Christian groups, including Baptists, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics, operate private schools and can conduct religious instruction. Private schools, both nonreligious and religious, are open to adherents of all religions.

Knowledge of the Quran is required by law for Muslim students in both public and private schools but is optional for non-Muslims. Every student, however, must pass an Arabic language exam in their final year of high school that includes linguistic mastery of some verses of the Quran. Islamic themes appear in lesson examples of other subjects' curriculums. The Islamic religion is an optional subject for secondary education certificate exams for non-Muslim students following the standard curriculum, or for Muslim students following international curricula.

The constitution specifies the judiciary shall be divided into civil courts, religious courts, and special courts, with religious courts divided into sharia courts and tribunals of other religious communities. According to the constitution, matters concerning personal status, which include religious affiliation, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are under the jurisdiction of religious courts. Matters of personal status in which the parties are Muslim fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of sharia courts. A personal or family status case in which one party is Muslim and the other is non-Muslim is heard by a civil court unless both parties agree to use a sharia court.

According to the constitution, matters of the personal status of non-Muslims whose religion the government officially recognizes are under the jurisdiction of denomination-specific courts of religious communities, except for matters of inheritance, when sharia is applied to all persons regardless of religious affiliation. Such ecclesiastical courts exist for the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, and Anglican communities. According to the law, members of recognized religious groups lacking their own courts may take their cases to civil courts, which, in principle follow the rules and beliefs of the litigants' denomination in deciding cases, unless both parties to a case agree to use a specific religious court. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religious groups. Such individuals must request a civil court to hear their case.

The OSJ appoints sharia judges, while each recognized non-Islamic religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. The OSJ maintains oversight of judicial performances of the sharia judges to ensure proper application of the provisions of the law. The law stipulates the cabinet must ratify



the procedures of each non-Islamic religious (ecclesiastical) court. All judicial nominations must be approved by a royal decree.

According to the constitution, sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction with respect to cases concerning “blood money” (*diyya*) in which the two parties are Muslims or one of the parties is not a Muslim and the two parties consent to the jurisdiction of the sharia courts. Sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction regarding matters pertaining to Islamic awqaf. Muslims are also subject to the jurisdiction of sharia courts on civil matters not addressed by civil status legislation.

Sharia courts do not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community’s laws in matters of personal status. Sharia court judges may annul the marriages of converts and transfer child custody to a Muslim nonparent family member or declare the children “wards of the state” and convey an individual’s property rights to Muslim family members.

According to the Personal Status Law (PSL), in accordance with its interpretation of sharia, marriages between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man are not permitted; the man must convert to Islam for the marriage to be considered legal. If a Christian woman converts to Islam while married to a Christian man, her husband must also convert to Islam for their marriage to remain legal. If a Christian man converts to Islam while married to a Christian woman, his wife does not need to convert to Islam for the marriage to remain legal. There is no legal provision for civil marriage or divorce for members of unrecognized religious groups.

Sharia governs all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. The PSL stipulates that regardless of religious background, mothers may retain custody of their children until age 18. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered Muslims and are not legally allowed to reconvert to their father’s prior religion or convert to any other religion. Like citizenship, religion is transmitted only via the father. Female children of a Muslim father who converts to Christianity remain registered as Muslims and thus are ineligible to marry a non-Muslim.

In accordance with sharia, adult children of a man who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam

unless the father's will states otherwise. All citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to the PSL, which mostly follows Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance if no equivalent inheritance guidelines are codified in their religion or if the state does not recognize their religion. In practice, Christian ecclesiastical courts use sharia-based rules to adjudicate inheritance.

National identification cards issued since 2016 do not list religion, but religious affiliation is still published on birth certificates, contained in records embedded in the identification card's electronic chip, and remains on file in other government records. National identification cards are renewed every 10 years. Passports issued since 2016 do not list religion. Passports are renewed every five years. Per the ban on conversion from Islam under sharia, converts from Islam are not allowed to change their religion on electronic records. Converts to Islam must change their religion on their civil documents, such as family books (a national registration record issued to every head of family), and on electronic records.

According to the 2022 amended electoral law, Christians are allocated nine of 138 parliamentary seats. Christians may not run for office in electorates not designated as Christian seats. No seats are reserved for adherents of other minority religious groups. The law stipulates that Muslims must hold all parliamentary seats not specifically reserved for Christians. There are no reserved seats for the Druze population. The government classifies Druze as Muslims and permits them to hold office as Muslims.

Although the constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, labor law does not explicitly prohibit it.

The National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), a quasi-independent institution established by law, receives both government and international funding. The Prime Minister nominates its board of trustees, and the King ratifies their appointment by royal decree. The board appointed in 2019 includes Islamists, former cabinet ministers, former judges, members of parliament, religious leaders, and civil society representatives.

The law prohibits parties formed on the basis of religion or sect, as well as membership in unlicensed parties.

In 2020, the Court of Cassation, the country's highest court, dissolved the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's (JMB) legal identity, saying the organization had failed to resolve its legal status. Authorities shut down the Brotherhood's headquarters and several offices in 2016 and transferred ownership of the property to a government-authorized offshoot, which said it severed ties with the broader movement. The Ministry of Social Development's committee in charge of the JMB's legal dissolution announced the Court of Cassation's final decision declaring the JMB officially dissolved had been implemented and directed any creditors to address financial or legal claims on the JMB to the ministry.

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

### **Government Practices**

Converts to Islam from Christianity continued to report security officials questioning them regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as some instances of surveillance, as part of the government's effort to prevent nominal conversions of convenience for the purpose of receiving advantageous divorce or inheritance benefits. Likewise, some converts to Christianity from Islam reported instances of harassment by security officials, in-person and electronic surveillance, and bureaucratic delays or rejections of document requests, including passport applications. Others reported security forces pressured converts to denounce their conversions and to recite Quranic verses in their offices.

Christian converts belonging to unregistered denominations described personal accounts of being summoned to security forces offices on several consecutive days, putting their jobs at risk. According to a 2022 report by Open Doors International, several Christian converts allegedly encountered physical and psychological abuse during police interrogation in 2021. Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported they continued to worship in secret to avoid scrutiny by security officials. Because of the sharia ban on conversion, government officials generally refused to change the religion listed on official documents from Islam to any other religion. Accordingly, the converts' religious practice did not match their official religion, opening them up to claims of apostasy and personal status issues involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Members of religious groups unable to obtain religious divorces converted to another Christian denomination or to Islam to divorce legally, according to reports from religious leaders and the Ministry of Justice. The chief of the OSJ continued to ensure that Christians wanting to convert to Islam did not have a pending divorce case at one of the Christian religious courts to prevent them from converting for the sole purpose of obtaining a legal divorce. The OSJ continued to enforce the interview requirement for converts to Islam, introduced in 2017, to determine whether their conversion reflected a genuine religious belief.

According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Freedom House, converts from Islam faced de facto “harassment” and “bureaucratic obstacles,” despite no penal or criminal provisions for conversion. Converts to Christianity from Islam reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their “true” religious beliefs and practices.

During the year, the government Media Commission reviewed 411 books and banned the distribution of 53 for religious and moral reasons, including sexual content or promotion of violence and extremism. The commission banned 15 books in 2021.

The Ministry of Awqaf continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary not approved by the government. Authorities continued to disseminate themes and required imams to choose from a list of recommended texts for sermons. Imams violating these rules risked being fined or banned from preaching.

Unofficial mosques continued to operate outside Ministry of Awqaf control in some cities, and imams outside of government employment preached without ministry supervision. Ministry of Awqaf inspections uncovered a very small number of cases of unregistered imams leading prayers in mosques during the year. In these cases, the government ordered all attendees and imams to cease their activities and gather in a designated mosque in their area for the Friday sermons led by a registered imam. Friday prayers in major cities were consolidated into central mosques, over which the Ministry of Awqaf had more oversight, continuing a process that began in 2018. The ministry allowed smaller mosques to continue Friday sermons along with their areas’ central mosque.

Evangelical church leaders continued to report facing some administrative obstacles because their churches were not a part of the CCL, and some government officials limited their ability to obtain licenses for some activities. They asserted some of the pressure arose from a difficult relationship with the CCL, which viewed evangelicals negatively and associated their churches with proselytization and U.S.-based, pro-Israel evangelical denominations. Some leaders and members of evangelical churches faced questioning by security services.

Authorities continued to deny a license to an unrecognized Christian church to operate a publishing house and approval for a private Baptist school in the city of Zarqa. Church leaders have said the congregation has considered selling the school because it has been an unusable asset for several years.

Expatriate religious volunteers from the evangelical Christian community continued to face bureaucratic delays in renewing residency permits. The government enforced a residency policy that limited the ability of churches to sponsor religious volunteers for residency. Observers suggested that volunteers were illegally proselytizing Muslims, while one observer reported some volunteers had been caught receiving local income in violation of their volunteer residency status. Volunteers were required to obtain additional approvals, including from the Ministry of Labor, lengthening the average renewal process by several months, according to church officials. Some expatriate religious volunteers reported the government refused to grant residency permission, forcing them to depart the country.

In June, several Catholic leaders, officials, and charities joined the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate of Baghdad to break ground and establish the first Chaldean Church in the country. The church had been in the planning stages for several years and had not yet been granted official recognition by the CCL or the government. Some experts estimated Jordan's Chaldean Church to have 20,000 members.

During the year, the government lifted most COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, such as social distancing requirements during congregational prayers in mosques. In March, the Prime Minister issued a defense order ahead of Ramadan that allowed worshipers to conduct prayers inside mosques. The order maintained

COVID mask-wearing requirements and stipulated worshipers must not exceed the capacity rules of the mosques.

The government policy of not recognizing the Baha'i Faith continued, but the government continued to allow Baha'is to practice their religion and included them in officially sponsored interfaith events. Sharia courts and the courts of other recognized religions continued not to issue Baha'is the marriage certificates required to transfer citizenship to a foreign spouse or to register for government health insurance and social security. The Department of Civil Status and Passports also continued not to recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, but it issued family books to Baha'is, allowing them to register their children, except in cases of marriages between a Baha'i man and a Baha'i woman when the marriage was erroneously registered as Muslim. In those cases, the children were considered illegitimate and were not issued birth certificates or included in family books and subsequently were unable to obtain citizenship or register for school. Baha'i parents could generally designate a dash in lieu of assigning Islam or the Christian religion on their children's birth certificates. There were cases of daughters of Baha'i converts unable to marry Baha'i men because the birth certificates and official documents of the women maintained their religious designation as Islam, the prior faith of their fathers.

Baha'is were able to obtain some documents such as marriage certificates through the civil courts, although they reportedly were required to pay fees that sometimes amounted to more than 500 dinars (\$710) for documents normally available for five dinars (\$7) through religious courts. Some Baha'is traveled to other countries to obtain officially recognized marriages and others sought marriages from sympathetic Muslim clergy, a process that Baha'is deemed unsustainable and unacceptable. Members of the Baha'i community stated that they continued to lobby the government unsuccessfully for recognition of Baha'is or at least for marriages, which are a requirement for their civil rights including transmitting citizenship to non-Jordanian spouses.

There continued to be two recognized cemeteries registered in the name of the Baha'i Faith through a special arrangement previously agreed between the group and the government. Baha'i leaders reported they continued to be unable to register other properties under the name of the Baha'i Faith but remained able to register property under the names of individual Baha'is. In doing so, the Baha'i

leaders said they continued to have to pay new registration fees whenever they transferred property from one person to another at the death of the registered owner, a process that created a large financial burden. Baha'i leaders stated concerns that registering properties under individual Baha'is also exposed the individuals to personal legal and financial liabilities. Baha'i leaders said they were using the civil courts to challenge their group's property registration restrictions, stating they were unable to legally protect Baha'i assets if individuals who registered Baha'i property under their names decided to misappropriate funds or property. The Baha'i community's request for religious exemptions for property registration fees remained pending.

The government continued to deny official recognition to other religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses. Some unrecognized religious groups reported they continued to operate schools and hospitals and were able to hold services and meetings if they maintained a low profile. Some Christian denominations said that although all religious groups were equal in the eyes of the constitution, the government practiced favoritism toward specific Christian groups that had more political power, which increased tensions among these religious groups.

In December, the CCL cancelled Christmas and New Year celebrations to mourn the death of four Public Security Directorate (PSD) officers killed in the line of duty during fuel price protests earlier that month, limiting holiday observances to church prayers and services. Like previous years, the PSD deployed added security patrols in Christian areas and public areas with Christmas decorations throughout the month. It also posted police units outside of church premises during Christmas and Christmas Eve services. Christian leaders generally welcomed heightened security of churches and Christian spaces during the holidays. However, other Christian community members and worshippers found some measures – the high number of security personnel and deployment of armored personnel carriers – exaggerated, making them feel uncomfortable by suggesting there were imminent threats against Christians.

The government authorized Christian civil servants leave for Sunday worship and religious holidays.

Religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Members of religious minorities served as

deputy prime ministers, senators, members of parliament (MPs), and ambassadors. After a reshuffle in October, the cabinet included one Druze member and one Christian member, a drop from the previous cabinet. A Christian MP served as House second deputy speaker for parliament's 2020-21 and 2021-22 terms.

The government continued to record Druze as Muslims on civil documents identifying the bearer's religious affiliation, without public objection from the Druze. Druze continued to report discrimination, and the way constituencies were geographically distributed hindered their coreligionists from reaching high positions in government civil service and official departments. The government did not include members of the Druze community in the Political Modernization Committee, established by the King in 2021 to reform the political system.

Christians and Druze achieved general officer rank in the military, but Muslims continued to hold most of the senior positions across the security and intelligence services.

The national school curriculum, including materials on tolerance education, did not mention the Holocaust, but some private schools included it in their curricula.

Christian leaders said that due to the national secondary school curriculum's failure to teach the country's pre-Islamic history, many Jordanians believed Christianity arrived in the country during the Crusades. One human rights advocate said polling and studies suggested shortfalls in the country's education system, contributing to a lack of Muslim awareness of the Christian faith, interdenominational rivalry between Christians, the nonrecognition of evangelicals and Baha'is, and reduced rights of agnostics, atheists, and Shia community. Pointing to other challenges, another academic who monitors religious issues said the country faced education gaps on topics like human rights and religious pluralism.

Members of non-Muslim religious groups, especially unregistered groups, continued to report occasional threats by the government to arrest them for disrupting public order if they proselytized Muslims. According to a member of the Christian community, security officials continued to refuse to renew residency permits for some foreign religious leaders and religious volunteers after raising



concerns their activities could incite extremist attacks. Others were denied residency permits on the basis of proselytization accusations.

Christian groups that maintained a lower profile noted examples of security forces monitoring them only when other Christian denominations submitted official complaints against them.

During annual Islamic holidays, the Minister of Awqaf attended competitions and ceremonies for memorization and recitation of the Quran, which had been suspended for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, the Minister attended a ceremony at the public Yarmouk University, which held a Quranic memorization competition for over 1,000 participants.

The MOA operated approximately 2,300 summer centers for male and female students to study and memorize the Quran and participate in noncurricular activities in various regions of the country. The MOA provided the centers and services free of charge, and approximately 150,000 students of different age groups participated under the supervision of local imams and preachers.

On September 19, the lower house of parliament approved a Child's Rights Law that provides for the basic rights of a child. While the law did not explicitly address religious instruction, it reinforced all children's right to education that is provided for in the PSL and stipulated the Ministry of Education will be required to prevent children from dropping out of school, ensure quality of education, and provide enough teachers and counsellors in educational institutions. Moreover, judicial officials said the law complemented efforts by the Sharia Prosecution in child protection cases. In the fall of 2022, Jordan-focused media outlets reported on some religious and social conservatives' objections to the legislation, citing a social media campaign promulgating allegations the law would promote Western values, encourage children to rebel against their parents, engage in premarital sexual relationships, and change their religion. One preacher said that the Child's Rights Law opposed the teachings of Islam, while an Islamist group said it was part of the "war against Islam."

The government deemed some children, including children of unmarried women or interfaith marriages involving a Muslim woman and converts from Islam to another religion, "illegitimate" and denied them standard registration. The

government issued these children, as well as orphans, special national identification numbers, which made it difficult for these children to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation.

Throughout the year, King Abdullah publicly met with several leaders from various Christian denominations, including from Protestant denominations not granted official CCL recognition. During the engagements, the King routinely advocated for the importance of interfaith dialogue and harmony, as well as promoting Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem's holy sites. During a Vatican meeting with Pope Francis in November, the King discussed preserving a Christian presence in the Middle East.

Parliament's extended debates on the Child's Rights Law coincided with the MOA's decision to temporarily shut down around 30 centers for Quranic teachings for not complying with new conditions set by the MOA that organized activities of community centers for Quranic and Islamic education. The MOA's restrictions imposed reduced working hours for the centers and established conditions for managers and teachers. Those seeking to teach at the centers also needed to pass MOA examinations. Some activists said compliance with some of the introduced conditions was not possible because many of the centers' workers were volunteers. Activists organized a few demonstrations after Friday prayers to protest the MOA decision. Some activists linked the MOA actions with a wider agenda associated with the Child's Rights Law to dispense with religious and traditional social norms.

In December, the government began work on a planned multimillion dollar, multi-phased project to develop the site identified by some scholars as the location of the baptism of Jesus. The development's goal is to attract Christian tourists and investment. The parliament passed legislation in 2021 establishing a nonprofit foundation to oversee and coordinate the project.

Throughout the year, RIIFS, established under the patronage of Prince Hassan bin Talal, continued to organize and host periodic discussions and sponsored initiatives with religious leaders and social activists to promote political pluralism, cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and civic responsibility in the country and throughout the region. It also held comparative religion seminars on Muslim and Christian doctrinal teachings.

Among several initiatives during the year, RIIFS sponsored a piano and vocal concert to promote “peace, dialogue, and nonviolence through artistic activities,” facilitating “a safe and creative space for dialogue and [the] exchange of ideas.” In March, RIIFS also held the 3rd Interfaith Conference with several Amman baccalaureate and other international schools. The conference allowed students to lead activities exploring how religion contributed to “shaping a cultural identity.” RIIFS also hosted interfaith dialogues and an academic seminar on Islam during the year.

In September, the MOA hosted the 42nd International Scientific Conference at the King Abdullah II Institute for the Rehabilitation of Imams and Preachers, aiming to combat misconceptions about Islam and highlighting Islam’s rejection of incitement. Sixty scholars and religious leaders from 13 countries attended the event.

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity reported continued social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse, including beatings, insults, and intimidation, from family members, neighbors, and community or tribal members. Many reported they worshipped in secret because of the social stigma they faced as converts, while others reported persistent threats of violence from family members protecting traditional honor. According to international NGOs, female converts from Islam were particularly vulnerable to harassment and pressure to renounce their conversions. Church leaders continued to report incidents of violence, pressure, and discrimination against religious converts and persons in interfaith romantic relationships; the latter continued to report ostracism and, in some cases, feuds among family members and violence toward those involved. Atheists and some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Converts from Christianity to Islam also reported social stigma from their families and Christian society. Christian women married to Muslim men were more often stigmatized. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination. Although an individual’s religion was no longer written on identification cards, one’s religion could often be surmised based on personal and family names. There were some reports of Christian women facing harassment for not wearing head coverings.

Religious leaders reported continuing online hate speech, frequently through social media, directed towards religious minorities and those who advocated religious moderation. Some NGOs turned off comments on websites and blocked repeat offenders on their social media accounts in an effort to avoid hate speech. There were numerous initiatives to combat hate speech, most of them led and driven by civil society organizations through funding from international donors.

Religious broadcasts, on both private and state television channels, as well as on social media platforms, continued as alternatives to regular in-person religious services, which were not allowed when the country was under periodic comprehensive lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some religious leaders and academics privately associated hate speech, intolerance, and extremism with poverty and a lack of educational opportunities in the country.

Criticism online and in social media continued to target converts from Islam to other religions. Religious minorities expressed concerns that some Muslim leaders preached intolerance. Christians reported they self-segregated into Christian enclaves in Amman and its outskirts to escape social pressure and threats. Although Christians clustered in specific neighborhoods and sought life abroad for safety and community support, Christian leaders stated it was difficult to categorize the desire to relocate solely based on religious identity, saying Christians relocated to the cities and moved abroad seeking economic opportunities as well.

Observers continued to report friction between Christian denominations on the CCL and evangelical churches not recognized by the government. Leaders from some CCL-affiliated churches said there were “recruitment efforts” and “hidden agendas” against their members and Jordanian society writ large by evangelical churches, and that evangelical churches were disrupting interfaith harmony, creating rifts in local society, and undermining the CCL’s relationship with the government and security services. CCL leaders stated they worried that outsiders “causing trouble” would bring unwanted attention on the Christian community. Members of the evangelical community continued to say some CCL leaders applied pressure on the government to not recognize evangelical churches in the

country. Evangelical religious entities operated approximately 70 churches across the country, according to a senior evangelical leader.

During the year, there were cases of atheists reporting physical abuse by family members for rejecting their family's religious beliefs. When the victims reported the incidents to the police, officers allegedly dismissed them, calling the issue a "family matter" and adding that the authorities were unable to intervene in these cases. The individuals continued to live in fear and risked further physical and psychological abuses.

Antisemitic hate speech on social media appeared to coincide with escalated tensions in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Several Jewish travelers reported that border authorities engaged in discriminatory practices, such as confiscating religious items at ports of entry. In one such case, according to May press reports, seven Jewish travelers were harassed by border officials at the Rabin/Wadi Araba Crossing near Aqaba, when the authorities allegedly demanded the travelers leave behind their tefillin boxes containing verses from the Torah, worn during weekday morning prayers. Due to the importance of the items, the travelers chose to cancel their trip and return to Israel. In July, 15 Haredi Jews alleged that border guards at the same border crossing demanded they cut their sidelocks before entering Jordan, although other reports alleged the travelers were banned for disruptive behavior. In September, two Jewish Americans residing in Israel published an op-ed describing how border authorities at that crossing demanded they leave behind Jewish religious items, including tefillin, tallit, and yarmulkes, before they attempted to enter Jordan in July en route to Saudi Arabia. The border authorities allegedly treated the travelers degradingly and told them Jewish religious items were forbidden from entering the country.

According to NGOs, the state-affiliated newspaper al-Rai published several articles containing antisemitic content or denials of the Holocaust. In April, writer Raja Talab referred to the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust as exaggerated and "Zionist propaganda" and said there was no ideological or moral difference between Zionism and Nazism. Separately, an al-Rai article in May written by Muhammad Kharroub stated Israel used the "Holocaust to extort money from the world." In another al-Rai column in May, Talab said that Russian

Foreign Minister Lavrov's claim that Hitler was Jewish was true and was supported by historical evidence.

In September, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that state-affiliated Jordan TV and independent media outlet al-Ghad TV broadcasted "false reports" on Twitter by referring to Denis Michael Rohan, the man convicted of the 1969 arson attack on al-Aqsa Mosque, as a Jew. Israel deported Rohan, a Christian, after he pleaded insanity. The ADL referenced another report on al-Ghad TV's website that "repeat[ed] the false accusation that Israel attempted to prevent Palestinian fire trucks from arriving at al-Aqsa." The ADL pointed to the posts as "ongoing disinformation campaigns scapegoating Jews and Israel for the attack."

Commentators said the May 11 killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while covering an Israeli raid in the West Bank ignited mixed reactions and fierce debate in social media when individuals posted comments that called Akleh, a Christian, a martyr, or asked God's mercy on her. Some Christian leaders reported they witnessed solidarity from the country's Muslim community and said several Sheikhs came to "[Akleh's] defense" on the matter. In al-Rai, Raja Talab wrote an article, "A Nazi with a Kippah," stating that then-Israeli Prime Minister Bennett ordered Akleh's assassination, calling Bennett and other Israeli officials "Nazis."

In December, the NGO Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) reported former MP Tarek Khoury, appearing on Hizballah's television channel in Lebanon, said Jews killed Jesus and opposed Christianity throughout its entire history. Khoury said Jesus had called Jews "the progeny of vipers" and children of the devil. He also stated the "enmity" between Judaism and Christianity was eternal.

According to press reports, 83 nonstate schools sent a letter to the Ministry of Education in July, asking the ministry to mandate teaching of the Quran for primary and secondary education levels. The letter called for Quran courses to be a prerequisite for any matriculation to Jordan's Universities, while providing an exception for non-Muslim students.

In May, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Jordan partnered with the Catholic Center for Studies and Media to host a conference on the status of Christians in the Middle East. Attendees included Christian clerics of various denominations,

academics, members of civil society, and several imams and Muslims. Elaborating on the historic exodus of Christians in the Middle East over the last century, conference speakers addressed the role Arab Muslims play in encouraging Christians to remain in their countries. Despite members of the country's evangelical community in the audience, an orthodox cleric presenter criticized the group as "fundamentalists," highlighting underlying local Orthodox-evangelical tensions.

In October, the Catholic Center for Studies and Media and the American University in Madaba hosted dozens of students from various Jordanian universities for a workshop on using social media to promote interfaith harmony. The training focused on promoting dialogue to counter religiously based hate speech and promote respect and human dignity.

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

The Ambassador and U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including with the Minister of Awqaf, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and senior officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to advocate for the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith tolerance.

During Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing together several religious officials, educators, and lay leaders to discuss the country's interfaith legacy and how to continue promoting respect and harmony with faith communities.

Embassy officers continued to meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, including unrecognized groups, religious converts, expatriate religious volunteers, and interfaith institutions such as RIIFS and the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, to discuss issues related to religious freedom.

The embassy supported religious minority communities through small-grant programs. The embassy used social media to promote religious tolerance and mark religious holidays, including through posting video messages, which received generally positive responses from social media audiences.