

QATAR 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states Islam is the state religion and sharia shall be “a main source” of legislation. According to the constitution, the Emir must be Muslim. The constitution guarantees the freedom to practice religious rites in accordance with “the maintenance of public order and morality.” The law punishes “offending” Islam or any of its rites or beliefs or committing blasphemy against Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations constitute the registered religious groups in the country. Unregistered religious groups are illegal, but authorities generally permitted them to practice their faith privately. Proselytizing for any faith other than Islam is prohibited.

In an annex to a March 2 report, the then UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stated authorities discriminated against Baha’is when applying personal status laws, and some Baha’is “were reportedly subject to administrative deportations and blacklisting resulting in loss of employment, income, and separation of families.” On March 11, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Baha’i International Community (BIC) stated cumulative instances of discrimination, restrictions, and human rights violations threatened the viability of the community in the country. In November, the NGO Humanists UK stated the government repressed expressions of core humanist principles. On August 16, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) ordered merchants and shopping malls to refrain from selling or displaying goods that were noncompliant with Islamic values, such as toys with rainbow colors, which are often associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) pride. Between November 20 and December 18, the country hosted the FIFA 2022 Men’s World Cup. Media reported that during the tournament, the government produced materials and supported activities designed to proselytize to visitors on behalf of Islam at venues such as local mosques and tourist sites. Officials said symbols of LGBTQI+ pride such as rainbow flags and gear were allowed, but security personnel did not consistently apply this permission. There were no reports of discrimination against individuals based on their religious affiliation in connection with World Cup activities.

A ban on worship outside the Mesaymeer Religious Complex, which the government described as temporary when instituted in 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19 and for security reasons, remained in effect. The complex, located on government land, provided worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, with approximately 75,000 to 100,000 expatriate Christians reportedly attending weekly services there. Citizens of the country and other Muslims were not allowed to attend services in the complex. The Christian Churches Steering Committee (CCSC), composed of representatives of the churches permitted to operate in the complex, wrote multiple letters to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on behalf of “villa” (house) churches requesting to meet to discuss additional real estate for Christian worship but received no reply by year’s end. In July, the NGO Institute for the Monitoring of Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) concluded, based on its ongoing review of the country’s textbooks, that the government made the greatest degree of progress in removing material containing antisemitic content, while it made minor progress in reducing content that conveyed hate towards non-Muslims and encouraged violent jihad. In September, the nomination of the country’s envoy to the United Nations in Geneva, Hend al-Muftah, to chair the UN Human Rights Forum was rejected because of her previous antisemitic and homophobic social media posts. Members of the government-allied International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) publicly framed homosexuality as an affront to Islam.

In June, commenters in traditional and social media responded negatively to statements regarding the Prophet Muhammad made by two ruling party Hindu officials in India. The editor of the *al-Watan* daily newspaper called Indians “the dirtiest” and Hinduism “dirty.” NGOs Open Doors USA and Middle East Concern stated indigenous converts to Christianity faced extreme pressure from their Muslim families and community, including, in extreme cases, violence. Many journalists framed homosexuality in religious terms. In May, a columnist in *al-Sharq* called homosexuals “perverts” and said monkeypox was “a warning from Allah.”

U.S. State Department and U.S. embassy officials continued to meet with senior government officials, relevant government bodies, and quasigovernmental religious institutions concerning the rights of religious minorities, Sunni-Shia relations, and antisemitism. Throughout the year, embassy officers met with

various faith communities, including the Hindu, Shia Muslim, Baha'i, and evangelical Christian communities, and with the CCSC, which oversees a variety of Christian denominations, to discuss issues of mutual concern. In March, the embassy co-organized a seminar on the role of interfaith dialogue in building trust in multicultural communities with the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) and the Katara Public Diplomacy Center.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.5 million (midyear 2022). Citizens make up approximately 11 percent of the population, while noncitizens account for approximately 89 percent. Most citizens are Sunni Muslims, and almost all others are Shia Muslims.

The U.S. government estimates that as of 2020, Muslims are 62.5 percent of the total population, Christians 13.7 percent, Hindus 15.9 percent, and Buddhists 3.8 percent. Boston University's 2020 World Religions Database states Muslims are 78.5 percent of the population, Christians 13.1 percent, Hindus 3 percent, atheists and agnostics 2.2 percent, and Buddhists 1.8 percent. Expatriates include Hindus, almost exclusively from India and Nepal; Roman Catholics, primarily from the Philippines, Europe, and India; and Buddhists, largely from South, Southeast, and East Asia. Smaller groups include Anglicans and other Protestant denominations, Egyptian Copts, Baha'is, and Greek and other Eastern Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and states sharia shall be "a main source" of legislation. According to the constitution, the Emir must be Muslim. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the Emir's branch of the Al Thani family. The Emir exercises full executive power. The constitution guarantees the "freedom to practice religious rites" to all persons "in accordance with the law and the requirements of the maintenance of public order and morality." It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

Conversion to another religion from Islam is defined by the law as apostasy and is illegal, although there have been no recorded punishments for apostasy since the country's independence in 1971.

The law provides for a prison sentence of up to seven years for offending or misinterpreting the Quran, "offending" Islam or its rites or beliefs, insulting any of the prophets, or defaming, desecrating, or committing blasphemy against Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. The law stipulates a seven-year prison term for producing or circulating material containing slogans, images, or symbols defaming these three religions. The law also prohibits publication of texts provoking social discord or religious strife, with punishment of up to six months in prison.

To obtain an official presence in the country, expatriate non-Muslim religious groups must register with the MFA. The only registered religious groups are Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations: the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Maronite, evangelical Protestant, and the Interdenominational Christian Churches. Protestant denominations other than the registered eight denominations, including nondenominational house churches, may register with the MFA with the support of the CCSC.

Registered groups may hold bank accounts in the organization's name, apply for property to build worship spaces (or have already built structures, such as private villas, recognized as worship spaces), import religious texts such as Bibles or Qurans, and publish religious newsletters or flyers for internal distribution. Unregistered entities are unable to open accounts, solicit funds, worship in private spaces legally, acquire religious texts from outside the country, publish religiously themed newsletters or pamphlets, or legally hire staff.

According to the law, unregistered religious groups (i.e., those not registered or under the patronage of one of the registered groups) that engage in worship activities are illegal, and members of those groups are subject to deportation.

The law restricts public worship for non-Islamic faiths. It prohibits non-Muslim religious groups from displaying religious symbols, which includes banning Christian congregations from advertising religious services or placing crosses outdoors where they are visible to the public. The law criminalizes proselytizing

on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation of any religion other than Islam and provides for punishment of up to 10 years in prison. Proselytizing on one's own accord for any religion other than Islam may result in a sentence of up to seven years' imprisonment. The law calls for two years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 riyals (\$2,700) for possession of written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity.

The government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of all religious books and materials. The government reviews, censors, or bans foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content. Registered religious groups may publish newsletters without government censorship but may only distribute them internally within their respective communities. Public bookstores are not allowed to sell Bibles. To import religious materials, groups must submit one copy to the Ministry of Culture and receive written approval before making large orders or risk having the entire shipment confiscated.

The only religions registered to have their own places of worship are Islam and Christianity. All mosques and Islamic institutions in the country, including Shia *husseiniyas* (congregation halls), must be registered with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA). The law designates the MEIA minister as the final authority for approving Islamic religious centers. The MFA approves Christian churches in coordination with the private office of the Emir. The Office of the Secretary General of the MFA, working in coordination with the director of the MFA's Human Rights Department, is responsible for handling church affairs.

A non-Muslim woman is not required by law to convert to Islam when marrying a Muslim; however, the law considers offspring of such a marriage to be Muslim. The law dictates that a non-Muslim man marrying a Muslim woman must convert to Islam. Marriages between two Muslims are performed at the Sharia Court in the Supreme Judicial Council. Marriages for religious minorities registered with the MFA – currently only Christian churches – may be performed by clergy recognized by the MFA and then registered with the Office of Land Registration and Legalization at the Ministry of Justice. Religious minorities not registered and not recognized by the MFA – including members of the Baha'i, Hindu, Sikh, and Jewish faiths, and atheists – must get married abroad to receive marriage certificates and then undertake a legal process, first in the foreign country and

then in Qatar, culminating with the MFA attesting to the certificate. There is no civil marriage.

Islamic instruction is compulsory for Muslim and non-Muslim students attending state-sponsored schools. Non-Muslims may provide private religious instruction for their children at home or in their faith services. All children may attend secular and coeducational private schools. The Ministry of Education requires that these schools must offer Islamic instruction, from preschool onwards, although students can opt-out of such instruction; non-Islamic formal religious education is prohibited.

A unified civil court system, incorporating sharia and secular law, has jurisdiction over both Muslims and non-Muslims. The unified court system applies sharia in family law cases, including those related to inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody. For Shia Muslims, a judicial panel decides cases regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other family matters using Shia interpretations of religious law. In other religious matters, family law applies across all branches of Islam. Non-Muslims are subject to sharia in cases of child custody, but civil law covers other personal status cases, including those related to divorce and inheritance.

A non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then, she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir, e.g., a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children generally remain with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls, at which time custody reverts to the husband's family, regardless of the mother's religion.

Criminal law is based on the principles of sharia. The type of crime determines whether those convicted receive a sharia-based sentence. There are certain criminal charges, such as alcohol consumption and extramarital sex, for which Muslims are subject to punishment according to sharia principles, including court-ordered flogging. Sharia-based punishments may also apply to non-Muslims in these cases. Muslim convicts may earn a sentence reduction of a few months by memorizing the Quran while imprisoned. Secular law covers dispute resolution for financial service companies. The law approves implementing the Shia

interpretation of sharia upon the agreement and request of the parties involved in the dispute.

The penal code stipulates that individuals seen eating or drinking during daylight hours during Ramadan are subject to a fine of 3,000 riyals (\$820), three months' imprisonment, or both.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The government submitted documents to the United Nations in 2018 and made a formal statement in its treaty accession document that the government shall interpret Article 18.2 of the ICCPR ("No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice") "based on the understanding that it does not contravene the Islamic sharia" and that the government would reserve the right to implement Article 18.2 in accordance with its understanding of sharia. The government also formally stated in its accession document that it would interpret several other provisions of the ICCPR in line with sharia, including Article 27 (regarding the rights of minorities "to profess and practice their own religion"). The government made a formal reservation against being bound by gender equality provisions in Article 3 and Article 23.4 regarding family law and inheritance.

Government Practices

In an annex to a March 2 report on the *Rights of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity*, then UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed stated Baha'is "reportedly face a precarious situation in Qatar due to discriminatory practices." According to the annex, titled *Experiences of persons belonging to the Baha'i minority community in conditions of increasing insecurity*, "Several members of the Baha'i minority in Qatar have been reportedly subject to administrative deportations and blacklisting resulting in loss of employment, income, and separation of families." The rapporteur's report also stated the Baha'i minority in the country "has consistently faced problems navigating personal status laws concerning marriage, divorce, and inheritance."

In a March 11 press release following the publication of the rapporteur's report and annex, the BIC stated, "Baha'is have lived in Qatar for almost a century –

decades before the country gained independence in 1971. In recent decades the Baha'i community has suffered instances of discrimination, restrictions, and human rights violations. The cumulative effect of these acts has now become untenable because they threaten the viability of the community." The BIC stated both it and the Baha'i community had made several attempts to engage the government on issues of employment discrimination, non-renewal of work permits, expulsions and blacklisting, and cemeteries, but the situation had continued to deteriorate, despite government assurances.

In a June communication with the news site *European Times*, the BIC said, "The government is apparently attempting to eradicate the Baha'i community." It cited the case of Remy Rowhani, the former director general of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and a leader in the Baha'i community, who in 2021 was tried and sentenced in absentia to one month in prison and a fine of 10,000 riyals (\$2,700) for what the *European Times* described as "charges linked to his religious beliefs." The court found him guilty of collecting and wiring donations without authorization in violation of laws regulating charitable activities. In a series of Twitter posts in September, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Nazila Ghanea said there had been an institutionalization of religious persecution against Baha'is and that the case against Rowhani was "fabricated," lacked due process, including the absence of evidentiary hearings at both the first and appellate trials; and was "purely due to his [Rowhani's] faith." Rowhani belongs to a family that has resided in the country since the 1950s and was granted citizenship by the Emir. Descendants of this family are the only Baha'i citizens of the country.

In September, representatives of the Baha'i communities of Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States delivered a letter addressed to the Emir to the Qatari embassies in their respective countries. The letter highlighted concerns with the "discrimination, restrictions, and human rights violations that Baha'is in Qatar have experienced for decades." The letter requested the intervention of the Emir. In a press release, the BIC representative to the United Nations stated, "The Baha'i International Community has repeatedly raised the alarm over a pattern of discrimination and human rights violations suffered over decades by the Baha'is in Qatar... Humanity is in danger of seeing the elimination of yet another religious minority from a Middle Eastern country."

On November 25, the NGO Humanists UK stated the government repressed the expression of core humanist principles. According to the NGO, “It is illegal to advocate secularism or a separation of religion and state. In short, it is impossible to be openly humanist in Qatar....”

On September 6, the government joined representatives of the other five Gulf Cooperation Council countries in issuing a statement that demanded the streaming service Netflix remove “offensive content,” citing unspecified material that “violates Islamic and societal values and principles.” *Al-Jazeera* stated the move appeared to be in response to “Netflix airing content that includes LGBTQI+ characters, as well as other material deemed ‘immoral.’”

The CCSC, representing villa churches, continued to submit written requests and updates to government officials to discuss issues related to its congregants and to advocate for increased space for the large number of parishioners; it had received no reply to these requests as of year’s end. During the year, the CCSC held irregular meetings with the MFA.

The Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) said the government had not yet allocated a plot of land for the alliance to build its premises at the Religious Complex. Sixty evangelical house churches, known as “villa churches,” were registered with the Ministry of Interior as worshipping under the umbrella of the ECAQ.

The government continued to state it would consider requests from nonregistered religious groups to acquire a place of worship if they applied to register but, as in previous years, said none had done so. Representatives of the Hindu community continued to express concern that the government had not granted Hindus permission to open new places of worship.

The MEIA continued to hire Sunni and Shia clerics and assign them to specific mosques. The ministry continued to provide, on an ad hoc basis, thematic guidance for Friday sermons, focusing mainly on Islamic rituals and social values, with clear restrictions against using pulpits to express political views or attack other faiths. The ministry reviewed the content of all sermons but did not require clerics to obtain prior approval of their sermons. The government reserved the

right to take judicial action, ranging from counseling to suspension to dismissal, against individuals who did not follow the guidance.

The MEIA estimated as of 2021 (the latest figures available), there were approximately 2,300 mosques in the country. Government officials estimated as many as 10 of these were Shia mosques, although online sources stated the number was closer to 15. Government officials stated the MEIA did not allow foreign funding for the building or upkeep of Shia mosques or other community facilities.

The MEIA continued to remind the public during Ramadan of its view of the correct way for Muslims to perform their religious duties. There were no reports of arrests or fines during the year for violation of the penal code's ban on eating or drinking in public during daylight hours in Ramadan. All restaurants not located in hotels were required to close in daylight hours during Ramadan.

As in 2021, Qatar's citizens and residents were allowed to travel to Saudi Arabia by land and air to perform the Hajj and Umrah following three years of closing the borders from June 2017 to January 2020 due to the severance of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The Saudi government set the quota for Qatari Hajj pilgrims at 1,087 for 2022, which, according to media, was lower than the Qatari government had requested.

Media outlets reported that during the World Cup, the government directly supported activities that promoted proselytizing for Islam. According to media sources, the government recruited Islamic clerics, including some from abroad, scholars, and at least 2,000 volunteers to proselytize to foreign soccer fans and produced thousands of books, posters, and pamphlets to be distributed on the occasion to advance this religious goal. The Associated Press reported that local mosques offered multilingual tours to visitors, booths at tourist sites handed out free copies of the Quran, and hotels made brochures about Islam available as part of a campaign encouraging foreign visitors to learn about Islam. According to the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), at least three Arab journalists criticized the government's efforts to promote Islam to World Cup visitors as inappropriate.

In the run-up to the World Cup, government officials repeatedly made public statements that all individuals were welcome and asked that visitors respect the local culture. Multiple media outlets speculated LGBTQI+ visitors could face religiously based discrimination and that the issue of fans consuming alcohol could be contentious. When the tournament began, officials banned alcohol consumption at stadiums. Officials said symbols of LGBTQI+ pride such as rainbow flags and gear were allowed, but, during the matches, security personnel occasionally prohibited spectators from displaying them. There were no reports of government discrimination against foreign visitors based on their religious affiliation in connection with World Cup activities.

In July, IMPACT-se updated its ongoing review of antisemitic and other intolerant content in the country's textbooks. The NGO stated its review showed "the positive trend identified in previous research [has been] maintained, but the process is slow." The NGO stated the amount of problematic material in the present national curriculum was "substantial." IMPACT-se said the greatest degree of progress occurred in removing material containing antisemitic content, while minor progress had been made in reducing material conveying hate towards non-Muslims and encouraging violent jihad.

Although the law prohibits Christian groups from advertising religious services, Christian churches continued to post hours of services and other information on publicly accessible websites; however, the government continued to prohibit them from publishing such information in local newspapers or on public bulletin boards. Church leaders and religious groups said individuals practiced self-censorship when expressing religious views online and relied mostly on word of mouth, church websites, social media platforms, and email newsletters to distribute information about religious groups' activities. These parameters remained in place during the World Cup.

The government maintained its policy of reviewing, censoring, or banning newspapers, magazines, books, and social media for "objectionable" religious content, such as an attack on Islamic values or depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. The government-controlled internet service provider, Ooredoo, censored religious internet content through a proxy server that monitored and blocked websites, email, and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) platforms, including Skype and FaceTime. Journalists and publishers said they continued to

practice self-censorship due to political or economic pressures regarding material the government might consider denigrating to Islam.

On August 16, the MOCI, via a Twitter post, ordered merchants and shopping malls to refrain from selling or displaying goods that “would violate Islamic values, public morals, customs, and traditions.” The tweet stated that authorities could levy a fine of up to one million riyals (\$275,000), issue a closure notice, or cancel a business’s commercial license if a business violated these guidelines. The MOCI statement pointed out that the law stipulates consumer protection which includes “the right to respect religious values, materials, and traditions.” The ministry did not define those values, but sources said the order was directed at merchandise in rainbow colors, which are often associated with LGBTQI+ pride. Secular Christmas decorations were available throughout the city at commercial businesses during the month of December.

The Mesaymeer Religious Complex, also known as “Church City” and located on government-owned land, continued to provide worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, with clear government instructions that Christian symbols such as crosses, steeples, and statues were not permitted on the exterior of church buildings. The Anglican Center within the Mesaymeer Religious Complex housed a number of other smaller denominations and offered space to 88 congregations of different denominations and languages.

The CCSC made proposals to the MFA to prepare for the expected surge in the number of worshippers during the World Cup tournament but received no response. The proposals included installing temporary tents within the Mesaymeer Religious Complex and using playgrounds at school campuses to hold religious rituals and services. The government took no action on these proposals and did not expand non-Muslim places of worship during the World Cup. The CCSC reported that during the games it was able to accommodate most visiting Christian worshippers.

According to church leaders, approximately 75,000 to 100,000 expatriate Christians continued to attend weekly services at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex. Citizens of the country and other Muslims were not allowed to attend these services. Representatives of the CCSC reported overcrowding in seven buildings in the complex, and they noted difficulties with parking, access, and

time-sharing of worship space. In addition to the permanent buildings, the government allowed the churches to erect tents during Easter and Christmas outside the primary complex to accommodate more congregants for services during these observances. The government continued to enforce strict security measures at the complex, including closing parking lots, setting a curfew on church access, and using metal detectors. Ministry of Interior security personnel asked churchgoers to show identification at the gates because non-Christians, whether expatriates or citizens, were prohibited access to the complex. Sources said this was an informal rather than legal practice, and that authorities determined the individual's religion based on their surname. The government continued its ban on worship outside the complex, which the government had described as a temporary measure both to limit the spread of COVID-19 and for security reasons when it instituted the ban in 2020.

The CCSC reported that Christian clergy were allowed to visit members of their congregations when they were hospitalized and to conduct monthly trips to both male and female prisons to meet with incarcerated Christians.

The government prohibited the slaughter of animals outside of licensed facilities, a measure it said was intended to ensure hygienic conditions. In practice, individuals were able to conduct ritual slaughter in private.

At year's end, there were several local cemeteries for Muslims and one for all non-Muslims. The Baha'i community also reportedly maintained its own cemetery.

Church leaders stated their ability to collect and distribute funds for charity continued to be limited by the government's restrictions on the number and type of bank accounts churches could hold, as well as reporting requirements on donors and on contractors doing business with churches. Some smaller unregistered churches reportedly used the personal accounts of religious leaders for church activities.

The government allowed the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States to open a kosher kitchen, to serve Jewish fans attending the World Cup. The kitchen, operating out of a Doha hotel, made over 100 sandwiches a day to feed fans who kept kosher, facilitating their attendance at the tournament.

In September the United Nations rejected the nomination of the country's envoy to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Hend al-Muftah, to chair the UN Human Rights Forum because of previous antisemitic and homophobic Twitter posts that she later deleted. The NGO United Nations Watch documented dozens of tweets by al-Muftah between 2011 and 2021 and described them as "discriminatory and conspiratorial." The group cited tweets in which al-Muftah called Jews "enemies," said that Jews "dominated, tyrannized, and ruled the world," and said that "the American Zionists control the U.S. media." In other tweets, she invoked Islam, called for God's curse upon gays, and said that "gays do not deserve rights." According to MEMRI, the failure of al-Muftah to secure the post "sparked rage against the West in Qatar, as well as a wave of support and admiration for al-Muftah and her views."

The country continued to host the headquarters of the IUMS, a group widely viewed in the press and academia as being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni transnational organization that promotes political Islam. Although IUMS stated it was an independent association of scholars, observers said its close relationship with the government helped it to serve as an instrument of the country's soft power. Media reported that when Egyptian-born Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, head of the IUMS, passed away in September, the Emir visited his home to offer condolences. The *New York Times* reported Deputy Emir Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani and other government officials attended his funeral on September 27 in Doha.

As part of a campaign by the government-allied IUMS aimed at the LGBTQI+ community and its members before the World Cup, Muhammad al-Mukhtar al-Shinqiti, an IUMS member and a lecturer at Qatar University, posted on Twitter, "In Western societies the line between a man and a beast is becoming blurred. They seek to disseminate this bestiality among the rest of humanity by using sports to market grave transgressions that destroy people's humanity. Muslims are the last hope for saving mankind from these grave transgressions, and they must resolutely oppose this moral anarchy and nihilism." Another IUMS member, Muhammad Saghir, called homosexuality an "abomination," "corruption," "debauchery," and "moral degeneracy" in a May posting on the *al-Jazeera* website. He also wrote that Muhammad had predicted "plagues and diseases" and would appear among such people, and he concluded that the world had "witnessed the truth of this in the global plagues and pandemics, and in the

appearance of diseases linked specifically to forbidden sexual relations such as adultery or relations between two men or two women, among them syphilis, gonorrhea and AIDS, and now monkeypox....”

On May 24 and 25, the DICID hosted the 14th edition of its international conference under the theme “Religions and Hate Speech: Between Scriptures and Practice.” Approximately 270 leaders, scholars, academics, and researchers from 78 countries representing the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) attended the conference; all Muslim representatives were Sunni. The final statement of the conference called for unifying efforts to refine educational curricula and to take serious legal actions against the media platforms that promote hate speech, specifically towards Muslims and Islam. Some attendees noted that the conference did not include representatives of non-Abrahamic faiths or Shia Muslims, and Christian representatives were not included in speaking roles. One member of the Baha’i community reported he was turned away from the event even though he was able to register to attend. Only three Qatari panelists participated in the conference and freedom of religion in the country was not discussed.

In April, Indian media reported that the Qatari government banned the Tamil language movie *Beast* because of the film reportedly stereotyped Muslims as terrorists.

On June 5, the MFA summoned the Indian ambassador to protest statements made by the spokesperson of India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that were deemed to insult the Prophet Muhammad. On June 19, the website *Middle East Monitor* stated the Turkey-based Andalou Agency reported that IUMS called for the enactment of laws to ban insults against religions and religious beliefs. In a statement, IUMS said it would send Islamic scholars to Islamic countries for talks on what it characterized as the increasing insults against Islam and ask the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the UN to encourage countries to draft legislation to ban any insults against religious figures or beliefs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In June, commenters in traditional and social media responded to statements made by two ruling BJP party Hindu officials in India that were deemed to insult

the Prophet Muhammad. Trending hashtags emerged calling for a boycott of Indian products. The backlash dominated traditional press, with local publications amplifying official government denouncements of the statements, as well as issuing editorials and caricatures expressing discontent. Fahed al-Emadi, the editor of the *al-Watan* daily newspaper (owned by the family of the country's Defense Minister), posted a comment calling Indians "the dirtiest" and Hinduism "dirty" and using an expletive to describe one of the officials. The Qatari response was met online by strong reactions from Indian social media users, who took to Twitter with a hashtag calling for a boycott of Qatar Airways.

In its 2022 *World Watch List* report, the Christian NGO Open Doors USA stated, "Christians in Qatar are primarily foreigners who tend to be migrant workers. These foreign Christians are much freer to live out their faith in Qatar than the nationals, although foreigners might also experience pressure....[The] small number of indigenous converts...face extreme pressure from their Muslim families and community." The NGO Middle East Concern stated on its website, "Qatari nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members. In principle, those considered apostates face severe sanctions under Islamic law, including the death penalty."

There were reports that cartoons, opinion articles, and certain news coverage in local newspapers and other media outlets periodically carried antisemitic content.

MEMRI reported sociologist Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Khazraj al-Ansari said in a video posted to his YouTube channel on June 26 that the 1973 *Roe versus Wade* decision, which legalized abortion in the United States, had been part of a plan to decrease the world's human population. Al-Ansari has over 150,000 followers on YouTube. He said that the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe* was being fiercely opposed by the "enemies of humanity," including Zionist-controlled TV channels, because it "interrupts their filthy scheme."

According to an October 6 Reuters report, a deceptive social media posting made to appear as an official government statement warned World Cup fans to show "respect to the [country's] religion and culture" by avoiding such behaviors as "drinking alcohol," "homosexuality," "immodesty," "profanity," "dating," and "not respecting places of worship." Reuters stated that the posting could be traced to

a Qatari citizen group called “Reflect Your Respect,” which, according to the Doha newspaper *al-Sharq*, was launched in 2014 to remind foreigners to respect the country’s conservative customs. The government and soccer’s ruling international body stated that the communication did not reflect government policy.

Many journalists framed homosexuality in religious terms. In a May 22 column in *al-Sharq* entitled “Ideological Terror,” local journalist Amal Abd al-Malik stated that the West employed a double standard in defending the freedom of gays, whom she described as “perverts,” while suppressing the freedom of those who oppose homosexuality. She added that monkeypox was “a warning from Allah.” On June 11, another columnist for *al-Sharq*, Abd al-Aziz al-Khater, posted to Twitter, “I do not regard the gay community or the presence of gays at the coming World Cup [tournament] as a threat to our culture or religion. [Besides,] this is an international tournament we successfully fought to host, and we accepted the terms for doing so, including that of welcoming members of this group and of other groups, such as hooligans. This has been [part of] this tournament from its inception, and there is no threat to our culture or religion.” In a November 23 column in the daily *al-Raya*, journalist Ahmad Ali wrote that including in the World Cup opening ceremony the Quranic verses, “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another” was an expression of peaceful coexistence but also a reaffirmation that the purpose of males and females was procreation. Ali called homosexuality “a degeneration of human nature, a decline into filth, a corruption of masculinity, and an attack on femininity.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials continued to meet with senior government officials and relevant government bodies, as well as with quasi-governmental religious institutions, concerning the rights of religious minorities, Sunni-Shia relations, and antisemitism. In October, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights raised the issue of religious minorities’ rights during her visit to the country. Embassy officers discussed with officials the situation of religious minorities in Qatar and how visitors of different faiths and LGBTQI+ visitors would be treated during the World Cup, in light of the

government's statements that 'all are welcome' and visitors should respect the local culture.

Throughout the year, embassy officials met with representatives of the Baha'i community to discuss ongoing concerns such as reports of discrimination, including arrests and deportations, of members of the Baha'i community, lack of freedom to worship, and the Remy Rowhani case. Embassy representatives also met with the CCSC to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as the government's lack of response to the group's requests to meet and a lack of authorized worship space. Embassy officers also met with members of the Hindu, Shia Muslim, Jewish, and evangelical Christian communities.

In March, the embassy cooperated with the DICID and the Katara Public Diplomacy Center in organizing a seminar on the role of interfaith dialogue in building trust in multicultural communities. The seminar was part of the embassy's celebration of 50 years of U.S.-Qatari diplomatic relations. The seminar was widely covered in local papers and social media. In May, the embassy participated in an international conference on interfaith dialogue organized by DICID.