

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states that Islam is the country's official religion. It provides for freedom of worship as long as it does not conflict with public policy or morals. It states all persons are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religious belief. According to the constitution, sharia is the principal source of legislation, although the judicial system applies both sharia and civil law, depending on the case. The new penal code and electronic crimes law that came into effect in January retain prohibitions on blasphemy, proselytizing by non-Muslims, and acts the government interprets as provoking religious hatred, discrimination, or insulting religions.

The government, having designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in 2014, continued to restrict the activities of organizations and individuals allegedly associated with al-Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate. Police and courts continued to enforce laws prohibiting sorcery, and customs authorities occasionally denied or delayed entry to airline passengers carrying items deemed intended for sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft. There were reports of authorities arresting individuals for practicing black magic and witchcraft. Representatives of non-Islamic faiths again said registration and licensing procedures and requirements for minority religious groups remained unclear in all emirates. In July, the Dubai Community Development Authority (CDA) granted a license to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) to hold services at a temporary venue ahead of the construction of their temple. The Jewish congregation "Gates of the East" maintained its license with the Dubai CDA for religious services while discussions on plans to build a synagogue in Dubai were ongoing. The government continued to permit Shia Muslims to observe Ashura in private but not in public. According to some communities, social distancing measures limited capacity at religious venues, burdening non-Muslim faiths due to the limited number of houses of worship they were permitted, though these measures were ultimately lifted. Some houses of worship reported that pandemic restrictions led to the decline in collections during services.

In January, the country adopted a four-and-a-half-day workweek, with Friday afternoon, Saturday, and Sunday serving as the new weekend, after previously following the Islamic Sunday-to-Thursday workweek, with Friday and Saturday as its weekend. Unlike the rest of the country, Sharjah adopted a four-day workweek, maintaining the traditional Islamic weekend and adding Sunday as an additional day off.

The General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments (Awqaf) continued to provide weekly guidance for the content of sermons in Sunni mosques with the stated purpose of limiting the spread of what the authorities characterized as extremist ideology. Some Shia imams chose to follow Awqaf-approved guidance, while the Ja'afari Endowments Charitable Councils in Dubai and Sharjah, charged with management of Shia affairs, issued additional instructions to Shia mosques. Government-controlled internet service providers blocked access to websites critical of Islam or supportive of views the government considered religiously extremist. The government prohibited the dissemination of literature it perceived as supporting religious extremism. Minority religious groups said limits on construction of new houses of worship forced denominations to share premises and limited the frequency of prayer services, as well as prevented their relocation from industrial areas that women congregants were reluctant to visit at night. During the year, Abu Dhabi continued construction on the country's first, purpose-built synagogue.

According to non-Muslim religious community representatives, there was a high degree of societal tolerance for minority religious beliefs and traditions, particularly for those associated with houses of worship officially recognized by the federal or local emirate governments. Although conversion from Islam was strongly discouraged, conversion to Islam was encouraged. In some cases, organizations reported that hotels, citing government regulatory barriers, were unwilling to rent space for non-Islamic religious purposes, such as weekly church services. In Dubai, one of two licensed Hindu temples officially inaugurated a new, larger facility in October. The Israeli Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, the World's Fair held from October 2021 to March 2022, partnered with the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum to organize events commemorating International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27.

The U.S. Chargé d’Affaires, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and U.S. embassy and consulate general officers engaged government officials on issues pertaining to religious diversity, inclusiveness, and tolerance, as well as licensing procedures and regulatory practices involving religious and religiously affiliated minority groups. They met with representatives of minority religious organizations and community groups, including the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and Baha’i communities, as well as different Islamic groups during the year. In these meetings, U.S. officials discussed the promotion of religious tolerance and emphasized the U.S. government’s commitment to religious freedom. The embassy hosted events during Ramadan bringing together interfaith religious leaders. To mark Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, the embassy organized a documentary screening and discussion with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.9 million (midyear 2022). Approximately 11 percent are citizens, of whom more than 85 percent are Sunni Muslims, according to media reports. The vast majority of the remainder are Shia Muslims, who are concentrated in the Emirates of Dubai and Sharjah.

Of the estimated 89 percent of noncitizen residents, the majority comes from South and Southeast Asia. Although no official statistics are available on the percentage of the noncitizen Muslim population or the breakdown between Sunni and Shia Muslims, media estimates suggest less than 20 percent of the noncitizen Muslim population is Shia.

Of the total population (both citizen and noncitizen), the 2005 census, the most recent, found 76 percent of the population to be Muslim, 9 percent Christian, and 15 percent from other noncitizen religious groups, comprising mainly Hindus and Buddhists and including Zoroastrians, Baha’is, Druze, Sikhs, and Jews. Ahmadi Muslims, Ismaili Muslims, and Dawoodi Bohra Muslims together constitute less than 5 percent of the total population and are almost entirely noncitizens. The Pew Research Center estimated that in 2010, 76.9 percent of the total population was Muslim, 12.6 percent Christian, 6.6 percent Hindu, and 2 percent Buddhist, with the remainder belonging to other faith traditions. According to Boston

University's 2020 World Religions Database, the population includes approximately 125,000 atheists or agnostics, 72,000 Sikhs, and 49,000 Baha'is.

Although specific numbers vary, local community members estimate that the size of the UAE's Jewish population is less than 10,000.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution designates Islam as the official religion. It provides for freedom of religious worship "in accordance with established customs," provided this "does not conflict with public policy or violate public morals." The constitution states all citizens are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religious belief. The constitution states that the country is an independent, sovereign, and federal state comprised of seven emirates.

The law prohibits black magic, sorcery, and incantations, which are punishable by an unspecified prison term, a fine of no less than 50,000 dirhams (\$13,600), and deportation in the case of noncitizens. Individuals seeking the aid of sorcerers also face jail sentences and/or fines.

The law defines blasphemy as any act insulting God, religions, prophets, messengers, holy books, or houses of worship. The law does not directly prohibit Muslims from converting to other religions; but the penal code's blasphemy provisions punish behavior viewed as contemptuous of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad or offensive to Islamic teachings.

The law provides for imprisonment of up to five years for preaching against Islam or proselytizing to Muslims, and up to 10 years for establishing an organization for the purpose of proselytizing.

The law also prohibits "abusing" a holy shrine or ritual of any religion, inciting someone to commit sin or contravene national values, labeling someone an infidel or unbeliever, and forming groups or holding meetings with the purpose of provoking religious hatred. Offenders are subject to fines up to two million

dirhams (\$545,000) and imprisonment that generally ranges from five to 10 years or more.

The law criminalizes any form of expression the government interprets as blasphemous or offensive toward “divine recognized religions,” inciting religious hatred, or insulting religious convictions. Offenders are subject to imprisonment for five or more years and fines from 250,000 dirhams to two million dirhams (\$68,100-\$545,000); noncitizens may be deported. The law prohibits any form of expression, including through broadcasting, printed media, or the internet, that the government determines is contradictory to Islam as well as literature it deems blasphemous or offensive toward religions.

Federal law does not require religious organizations to register or obtain a license to practice, although the formation of a legal entity, which requires some form of registration, is necessary for operational functions, such as opening a bank account, licensing clergy, establishing a house of worship, or renting space for special services and events. Each emirate oversees registration and licensing of non-Muslim religious organizations, and the process differs by emirate, organization, and circumstance; these procedures are not published by the emirate governments. The federal government has also granted some religious organizations land in free-trade zones, where they legally registered by applying for a trade license that allows them some operational functions. In Dubai, religious organizations are required to obtain a license from the CDA, and in Abu Dhabi, from the Department of Community Development (DCD). The governments of the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai also require religious communities to obtain permits for certain activities, including holding public events, collecting donations, and worshipping in temporarily rented spaces, such as hotels. The penal code stipulates an unspecified jail term and fines from 200,000 dirhams (\$54,500) for establishing or running an unlicensed house of worship or religious instruction.

The amended penal code that came into effect in January removes provisions prohibiting eating, drinking, and smoking in public during fasting hours for the month of Ramadan and eating pork throughout the year for Muslims. The governments of the Dubai and Abu Dhabi permitted restaurants to serve food during Ramadan fasting hours without installing curtains or otherwise covering the front of their businesses, in line with the lifting of such requirements in 2021.

In March, Sharjah announced that it would issue permits to eateries to serve food during Ramadan fasting hours, but that services would be limited to off-site food. Consumption of alcohol by non-Muslims is not criminalized at the federal level; each emirate, however, is allowed to regulate “the use, circulation, and possession or trade of alcoholic beverages,” which may include a ban for Muslims at the local level. The government of Sharjah Emirate bans all consumption of alcohol.

Federal law prohibits churches from erecting bell towers or displaying crosses or other religious symbols on the outside of their premises, although they may place signs on their properties indicating they are churches.

Islamic studies are mandatory for all students in public schools and for Muslim students in private schools. The government does not provide instruction in any religion other than Islam in public schools. In private schools, non-Muslim students are not required to attend Islamic study classes. All students, however, are required to take national social studies classes, which include teaching on Islam. The government permits Christian-affiliated schools to provide instruction tailored to the religious background of the student – Islamic studies for Muslim students, Christian instruction for Christian students, and ethics or comparative religions for others.

Private schools deemed to be teaching material offensive to Islam, defaming any religion, or contravening the country’s ethics and beliefs face potential penalties, including closure. All private schools, regardless of religious affiliation, must register with the government. Private schools are required to have a license from the federal Ministry of Education, and their curriculum must be consistent with a plan of operation submitted to and approved by the ministry. Each emirate’s government is responsible for administrative oversight of schools.

Land ownership by noncitizens is restricted to designated freehold areas. This restriction is an impediment to most minority religious communities, which consist of noncitizens, that wish to purchase property to build houses of worship. Non-Muslim houses of worship are generally built on lands that the rulers of the emirates provided to these communities.

The antidiscrimination law prohibits multiple forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination, and criminalizes acts or expressions the government interprets as provoking religious hatred or insulting religion; this provides a legal basis for restricting events, such as conferences and seminars. The law also criminalizes broadcasting, publication, and transmission of such material by any means, including audiovisual or print media, or via the internet, and prohibits conferences or meetings the government deems promote discrimination, discord, or hatred. Violations of the law carry a fine of up to two million dirhams (\$545,000) and prison sentences that can exceed 10 years.

A new labor law effective in February prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, nationality, ethnicity, or disability.

Muslim female public-sector employees are entitled to four months and 10 days of paid leave if their spouse dies but non-Muslim employees in the private and public sector are only entitled to five days of paid bereavement leave in the event of a spouse's death. Additionally, Muslim public-sector employees are afforded 15 days of leave to perform the Hajj pilgrimage, but no similar provisions exist for adherents of other religions.

According to the constitution, sharia is the principal source of legislation, although the judicial system applies both sharia and civil law, depending on the case. Sharia forms the basis for judicial decisions in most family law matters for Muslims, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Shia Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shia family law cases through a special Shia council rather than through the regular judicial system. In the case of noncitizens, or noncitizens married to citizens, the parties may petition the court to have the laws of their home country apply rather than sharia in cases involving divorce and inheritance. The federal law applies if either spouse is Emirati. Abu Dhabi allows non-Muslims to apply civil law in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony, proof of paternity, and custody.

Sharia also applies in some criminal matters. Civil law provides the basis for decisions on all other matters. When sharia courts try non-Muslims for criminal offenses, judges have the discretion to impose civil or sharia penalties. In these cases, judges generally impose civil penalties. Higher courts may overturn or modify sharia penalties. Since 2020, the law applies the same sentences for so-

called “honor killings” as other murder cases rather than applying reduced (lenient) sentences.

Federal legal reforms in 2020 removed flogging from the federal penal code, limited the jurisdiction of sharia courts to deal with blood money cases, and removed penalties for adultery, and cohabitation outside marriage. While the government has generally decriminalized consensual extramarital sex, it may be punishable by six months of imprisonment if a complaint is filed by a husband or guardian of either of the parties. Local sharia laws and punishments regarding adultery and consensual extramarital sex, also remain applicable.

Under the law, citizen and noncitizen Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women who are “people of the book” (Christian or Jewish). Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men. Marriages between non-Muslim men and Muslim women are not recognized under the law. Abu Dhabi’s Non-Muslim Family Court conducts civil marriages for non-Emiratis that are not recognized under sharia. Although its regulations stipulate that it conducts these marriages – and recognizes existing ones – between nationals of countries that do not apply Islamic law in matters of personal status, the court conducted multiple civil marriages for interfaith couples, and applicants for civil marriage are not questioned on religion.

Strict interpretation of sharia, which often favors the father, does not apply to child custody cases, and courts have applied the “best interests of the child” standard for several years. According to sharia, a divorced woman may lose custody of her children to their father once daughters reach 13 years of age and sons 11 years of age. Women may file for continued custody until a daughter marries or a son finishes his education. The father, deemed the guardian, provides for the child financially, while the mother, the custodian, provides day-to-day care of the child.

In custody cases involving noncitizens, UAE courts may apply the laws of the country of nationality of each child involved. Abu Dhabi’s personal status law allows for joint custody agreements, civil marriages, birth certificates for children of unmarried parents, the equality of men and women as witnesses, and new alimony and inheritance laws. The personal status law also allows for non-Muslim judges, creates a new court to hear these cases, and requires cases to be heard in

both Arabic and English. This personal status law does not apply to citizens; the divorce and joint custody provisions do not apply to some Muslim citizens of countries that base their law on sharia.

The country's citizenship law does not include religion as a prerequisite for naturalization. Non-Muslim wives of citizens are eligible for naturalization after seven years of marriage if the couple has a child, or 10 years of marriage if the couple has no children. There is no automatic spousal inheritance provision for wives under the law if the husband is Muslim and the wife is non-Muslim. Such wives may not inherit their husband's property unless named as a beneficiary in their husband's will.

Abu Dhabi's Judicial Department permits Christian leaders to legally mediate divorces for Christians and agnostics if the bride and groom are both residents of the emirate. The government permits church officials to officiate at weddings for non-Muslims, but the couple must also obtain the marriage certificate from the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department. In both cases of marriage and divorce, the church official must be registered with the Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development (DCD) as officially recognized to perform these acts.

Noncitizens may register wills in the emirate in which they live. Since 2020, personal status laws permit the general terms of a will to be dealt with according to the law of the country specified in the will or, in cases where a country is not specified in the will, the law of the deceased person's country of nationality. This is not applicable to property purchased in the UAE, however, which remains subject to UAE law. Non-Muslims may register their wills with the Abu Dhabi judicial system to safeguard their assets and preserve their children's inheritance rights. There are courts for personal status and for inheritance for non-Muslims in the Abu Dhabi Court of First Instance (trial court). In Abu Dhabi, in the absence of a will for a non-Muslim foreigner, their inheritance is distributed equally among their spouse, children, and/or parents. The emirate also allows wills to cover the entirety of a person's estate, which would include property in the UAE. In Dubai, foreigners may file wills at the Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) Court Wills and Probate Registry, which may cover assets held in the UAE as well as abroad. The DIFC Wills Service Center allows non-Muslim business owners and shareholders to designate an heir. Dubai wills not filed in the DIFC Court are subject to sharia.

The law prohibits membership in groups the government designates as terrorist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, or that promote damage to national unity or harm public order, with penalties up to life imprisonment and capital punishment. The law prohibits activities the government deems supportive of political or extremist interpretations of Islam, including promoting views the government believes qualify as hate speech, insult religions, promote sectarianism, damage national unity or the reputation of the state, or harm public order and public morals. Punishment may include up to 25 years imprisonment and fines up to one million dirhams (\$272,300). Electronic violations of the law are subject to a maximum fine of four million dirhams (\$1.1 million). Abuse of religion to promote sedition and strife or to harm national unity and social peace is punishable with not less than 10 years imprisonment and a fine of not more than 500,000 dirhams (\$136,000).

The law does not allow for political parties or similar associations. The law does not protect the right of individuals to organize politically and specifically bans a number of organizations with political wings, including the Muslim Brotherhood, as regional and local terrorist groups.

The Fatwa Council, headed by the president of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, is tasked with presenting a clear image of Islam, including issuing general fatwas and licensing individuals to issue fatwas, train muftis, and conduct research, in coordination with the Awqaf, an independent federal legal authority that reports directly to the cabinet. The Awqaf director general holds the title of deputy minister, and he and the Awqaf board of directors are appointed by the cabinet. The Awqaf is responsible for managing domestic Islamic endowments, imam tutelage, education centers, publications, and general messaging.

Under the law, emirate and federal authorities concerned with mosque affairs are responsible for naming mosques, providing and supervising the needs of mosques and prayer spaces, including religious centers used by Shia Muslims, determining the timing of the second call to prayer, organizing religious lectures, and preparing sermons. The law also defines acts prohibited in mosques, prayer spaces, and Eid musallas (open prayer spaces outside of mosques or prayer halls smaller than mosques) without a license, such as giving lectures or sermons,

holding Quran memorization circles, fundraising, and distributing written and visual material. The law further stipulates that citizen applicants must be given first consideration for vacant positions at mosques. The law prohibits those working in mosques from belonging to any illegal group or from participating in any political or organizational activities.

The law restricts charitable fundraising activities, including by religious organizations, by prohibiting the collection of donations or advertising fundraising campaigns without prior approval from authorities. Violations of the law are subject to an unspecified prison sentence, deportation, and a fine between 150,000 and 300,000 dirhams (\$41,000 – \$82,000). Under the cybercrimes law, the use of any information technology to promote the collection of any type of donation without a license is subject to an unspecified prison term and/or a fine between 200,000 dirhams and 500,000 dirhams (\$54,500 – \$136,000).

In Abu Dhabi, the Awqaf is entrusted with overseeing Islamic religious affairs across mosques, sermons, imam tutelage, and publications. Non-Islamic religious affairs fall under the mandate of the DCD, which regulates, licenses, and oversees non-Islamic houses of worship, religious leaders, religious events organized outside houses of worship, and fundraising activities across the emirate. The Abu Dhabi DCD uses a three-tier system of authorization for regulating non-Islamic houses of worship. Under the system, instituted in 2020, the DCD issues licenses to houses of worship, permits to denominations seeking authorization to operate under the licensed house of worship, and visas to the religious leaders of these denominations.

The Dubai CDA is the official body mandated to oversee all civil institutions and nonprofits in the emirate, including non-Muslim religious groups. The CDA issues operating licenses and permits for events and monitors fundraising activities. The law states that civil institutions may only collect donations or launch fundraising campaigns after obtaining the CDA's written approval. Fines for noncompliance range from 500 dirhams to 100,000 dirhams (\$140 – \$27,200). Repeated violations may result in the doubling of fines, not to exceed 200,000 dirhams (\$54,500).

Authorized religious organizations and charities are eligible to receive tax-exempt status.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

During the year there were reports of persons held incommunicado and without charge because of their political views or affiliations, which often involved alleged links to Islamist organizations. The government continued to impose restrictions for speech related to and in support of Islamist political activities.

In January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that Ahmed Mansoor, a human rights activist convicted in 2018 under the cybercrime law of insulting the “status and prestige of the United Arab Emirates and its symbols” and of seeking to damage the country’s relationship with its neighbors by publishing information critical of those governments on social media, faced retaliation following the publication of a letter he wrote in 2021 alleging mistreatment in detention and unfair trial procedures. The government previously had said that Mansoor had promoted “a sectarian and hate-filled agenda.” According to the January HRW report, prison authorities “moved Mansoor to a smaller and more isolated cell, denied him access to critical medical care, and confiscated his reading glasses.”

According to an international human rights organization, at least 40 political detainees due for release in the summer remained in detention after completing their sentences, including Mohammed al-Roken, a human rights lawyer arrested in 2012 and sentenced to 10 years in prison over his defense of alleged members of al-Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate.

The government, having designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in 2014, continued to restrict the activities of organizations and individuals allegedly associated with al-Islah.

Police and courts continued to enforce laws prohibiting sorcery. In addition, customs authorities occasionally denied or delayed entry to passengers carrying items deemed intended for sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft. There were multiple reports in local media of arrests of individuals practicing black magic and witchcraft. In April, local media reported the case of a foreign domestic worker

sentenced to one month in prison and deportation after they admitted during interrogation to using witchcraft on their employer. Local media reported that customs officials arrested a traveler in July who attempted to smuggle “black magic contraband” to Dubai, including talismans, amulets, rings, bullets, and bracelets made from animal skin.

Representatives of non-Islamic faiths again said registration and licensing procedures and requirements for minority religious groups remained unclear in all emirates. The federal government did not require non-Muslim religious groups to register, but, according to some observers, the lack of a clear legal designation continued to result in many groups having ambiguous legal status and created difficulties for them in carrying out certain administrative functions, including banking and signing leases. Religious groups said the bureaucracy was slow to conduct security checks and issue necessary visas. The governments of individual emirates continued to require religious groups to register as a precondition for establishing formal places of worship, such as temples, mosques, or churches, or for holding religious services in rented spaces, such as hotels or convention centers.

The Awqaf continued to vet and appoint men to be Sunni imams (except in Dubai), based on their educational background and knowledge of Islam, along with security checks. According to the Awqaf, the government continued to fund Sunni mosques, except for those considered private, and retained all Sunni imams as government employees.

Dubai’s Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD) controlled the appointment of Sunni clergy and their conduct during worship in Dubai mosques. All imams in Dubai’s more than 2,100 Sunni mosques were government employees and included both citizens and noncitizens. Dubai’s IACAD maintained more stringent qualification requirements for expatriate imams than for local imams, such as requiring them to demonstrate memorization of larger parts of the Quran, and starting salaries were much lower, a practice permitted under federal law. Expatriate imams also could not obtain other employment without permission from the authorities. Local communities said these additional requirements did not hinder their ability to find qualified imams.

The Ja'afari Endowments Charitable Councils (JECCs), located in Dubai and Sharjah and appointed by the rulers of their respective emirates, managed Shia affairs for their respective emirates, including overseeing mosques and community activities, managing financial affairs, and hiring imams. In other emirates, Shia affairs were overseen by the courts of the respective rulers. The councils complied with weekly guidance from IACAD and the JECC in Dubai at times issued additional instructions on sermons to Shia mosques. Shia adherents worshiped in and maintained their own mosques. The government considered all Shia mosques to be private; however, they were technically eligible to receive some funds from the government upon request. Shia observers said they doubted the government would provide funding in practice, and therefore did not seek it.

Ismaili Muslims continued to appoint their own community leaders.

Abu Dhabi's DCD requires that all non-Muslim houses of worship obtain permission from different government authorities before obtaining full licensure. Minority leaders noted increasing transparency by the DCD in the licensing process during the year. The DCD licensed a Jewish congregation that held weekly services in rented spaces.

In July, the Dubai CDA granted an official license to the Church of Jesus Christ to hold religious services at a temporary venue ahead of the construction of a temple on government-granted land at the legacy site of Expo 2020 in Dubai. The Church continued to maintain a chapel in Abu Dhabi.

While the Jewish congregation "Gates of the East" maintained its license with the Dubai CDA for religious services, discussions between the congregation and the government on plans to build a synagogue in Dubai were ongoing, and the congregation continued to rent hotel rooms for worship. A May AP report stated the emirate's government offered a site at a Jebel Ali religious compound in an industrial area on the outskirts of the city, where many of the emirate's churches are located. The article stated the location would pose problems for Jews who refrain from the use of mechanical devices, including cars, on the Sabbath.

Unlike a "regular" 12-month license associated with a permanent venue, the temporary licenses maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ and "Gates of the East" must be renewed every three months and do not allow the organizations to

secure religious worker visas. Religious workers maintain legal residence in Dubai through other employment.

Community leaders stated the tacit Abu Dhabi guidelines requiring non-Muslim religious leaders to work in the ministry full-time and be sufficiently credentialed in order to obtain a clergy visa continued to create difficulties for religious leaders who served their congregations on a volunteer or part-time basis or who did not have a theology degree. Observers report that Abu Dhabi authorities exempted some non-Muslim religious groups from this requirement on an ad-hoc basis. Under the system, licensed Abu Dhabi-based houses of worship independently vet these religious leaders and formally recommend to the DCD whether it should issue them a visa. Some religious community members stated the system discriminated against smaller and less recognized denominations and forced them to either end operations or join with other denominations.

Within prisons, authorities continued to require Muslims to attend weekly Islamic services, and non-Muslims reported some pressure to attend ostensibly nonmandatory lectures and classes about Islam. Some non-Muslim clergy stated incarcerated members of their communities did not have worship spaces. Non-Muslim clergy said that when authorities granted them prison access, authorities permitted them to take Bibles to the prisoners. In some emirates, non-Muslim clergy wishing to visit prisoners faced bureaucratic hurdles, such as opaque and arbitrary responses to visit requests, while others were not permitted to visit prisoners at all.

The government continued to permit Shia Muslims to observe Ashura in private but not in public. There were no public processions in Dubai or the northern emirates, where the majority of the country's Shia population resides, due to federal laws against public gatherings.

In February, the government reduced COVID-19-related social distancing requirements at houses of worship from 1.5 meters to 1 meter, despite simultaneously removing them altogether for most nonreligious venues, including shopping centers, restaurants and cafes, and entertainment venues. In September, the government removed all social distancing requirements at houses of worship but kept in place a requirement for congregants to remain masked, while simultaneously removing indoor mask mandates for all other venues except

hospitals and public transportation. The government lifted all COVID-19-related restrictions for houses of worship in November.

According to representatives of various religious groups, social distancing measures limiting capacity at religious venues put undue burdens on non-Islamic faiths due to the limited number of houses of worship non-Muslim communities were permitted. Such restrictions also led to a considerable decrease in money collected during services. Financial hardships led one church to suspend groundskeeping operations, and another reported having to suspend unspecified projects. Some religious leaders expressed concerns over difficulties in receiving approvals for gatherings outside of worship activities, such as educational or youth gatherings, due to restrictions imposed during COVID-19 that had not been specifically lifted. One church reported a workaround that permitted communion to be resumed, but only after months of discussions with the DCD.

The government of Abu Dhabi, as a safety measure, has installed closed circuit television cameras in houses of worship and other spaces used for prayer, as it has also done for most other large public facilities.

In April, authorities permitted Ramadan tents for adherents to gather for iftar meals for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic but with scrutiny, to ensure compliance with COVID-19 safety measures.

The government required all conference organizers, including religious groups, to register conferences and events, including disclosing speaker topics.

Individuals belonging to non-Islamic faiths, including Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism, said they could worship and practice without government interference within designated compounds or buildings or in private facilities or homes, provided they observed the prohibition on proselytizing. While the government did not generally allow non-Muslims to worship, preach, or conduct prayers in public, there were reports of government-sanctioned exceptions.

In September, leaders of the Hindu community attended a ceremony marking the placement of the first marble pillars as part of the ongoing construction of Abu Dhabi's Hindu temple, expected to be completed in 2024.

Press reported that thousands of Jews celebrated Passover in the UAE in April. The wedding of UAE resident Rabbi Levi Duchman in September was reportedly attended by over 1,500 guests and received extensive media coverage, with a press release from Duchman's Chabad organization describing the event as the "largest Jewish event ever held" in the country.

The Dubai Quran Award program continued to allow prisoners who memorized the Quran to have their sentences reduced or be granted amnesty. In January, local media reported that 275 prisoners participated in the Quran memorization program in 2021 and 333 prisoners participated in 2020.

In January, the government adopted a four-and-a-half-day workweek, with Friday afternoon, Saturday, and Sunday serving as the new weekend. The country previously followed the Islamic workweek, which uses Friday and Saturday as its weekend. As part of the change, the government shifted Friday midday sermons and prayers to 1:15 p.m., slightly later than the previous schedule. Unlike the rest of the country, Sharjah adopted a four-day workweek, maintaining the traditional Islamic weekend and adding Sunday as an additional day off.

In September, local news reported that at least 3,000 civil marriages had been performed in Abu Dhabi.

The country's two primary internet service providers, both majority-owned by the government, continued to block certain websites critical of Islam or supportive of religious views the government considered extremist, including some Islamic sites. The service providers continued to block other sites on religion-related topics, including ones with information on Christianity, atheism, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity. International media sites, accessed using the country's internet providers, contained content filtered by government censors.

Some religious groups, particularly Christians and Hindus, advertised religious functions in the press or online, including holiday celebrations, memorial services, religious conventions, and choral concerts, without government objection. The government also allowed businesses to advertise, sell merchandise, and host events for non-Islamic religious holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali.

The government allowed local media to report on non-Islamic religious holiday celebrations, including service times and related community safety reminders.

Observers familiar with the media environment stated government officials warned journalists against publishing or broadcasting material deemed politically or culturally sensitive. Editors and journalists commonly practiced self-censorship due to fear of government retribution, particularly since most journalists were foreign nationals and could be deported. Authorities did not allow the importation or publication of some books they viewed as critical of the government, Islam, and local culture, as well as books that supported the Muslim Brotherhood or its ideology.

In January, the government announced the implementation of standards for media content, mandating that media content should “refrain” from offending God and Islamic beliefs and should respect other “heavenly religions.” The standards listed various topics that content creators should not publish, to include harming national unity and social cohesion or violating the sanctity of public morals. Authorities announced in June that the Disney movie *Lightyear*, which includes two same-sex characters kissing, would not be licensed for public screening due to its “violation” of media content standards. In June, authorities allegedly withdrew copies of a locally published children's magazine for offending social values by showing a rainbow-colored cartoon character perceived to speak in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) equality.

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 LGBTQ characters, as well as other material deemed ‘immoral.’”

The Awqaf continued to oversee the administration of Sunni mosques, except in Dubai, where they were administered by the IACAD. On its website, the Awqaf stated its goals included offering “religious guidance in the UAE to instill the principle of moderation in Islam.” The Awqaf stated it continued to distribute weekly guidance to Sunni imams regarding subject matter, themes, and content

of Friday sermons; published a Friday sermon script every week; and posted the guidance on its website. The Awqaf regularly held training workshops to instruct imams on sermon delivery and how to communicate the values of moderation and tolerance.

The Awqaf applied a three-tier system in which junior Sunni imams followed the Awqaf script for Friday sermons closely; midlevel imams prepared sermons according to the topic or subject matter selected by Awqaf authorities; and senior imams had the flexibility to choose their own subject and content for their Friday sermons. Sermons sometimes dealt with contemporary topics; for example, in an apparent response to public outcries against Pride Month in June, sermons urged people to safeguard the “primordial disposition” of the sexes and to instill in their children an acceptance of the “human natural design” and rejection of “alien, imported, and intrusive ideas.” Other sermon topics reportedly included the power of contemplation, prayer, and piety as keys to inner peace. Some Shia sheikhs (religious leaders) chose to use Awqaf-approved weekly addresses, while others wrote their own sermons. Friday sermons were translated into English and Urdu on the Awqaf’s website and mobile application.

The JECCs in Dubai and Sharjah complied with guidance from the IACAD and issued additional instructions on sermons to Shia mosques.

The Awqaf operated official toll-free call centers and a text messaging service for fatwas in Arabic, English, and Urdu. Fatwa categories included belief and worship, business transactions, family issues, women’s issues, and other Islamic legal issues. Callers explained their question directly to an official mufti, who then issued a fatwa. Both female (muftiya) and male (mufti) religious scholars worked the telephones at the fatwa hotline. The Awqaf also operated an online “e-fatwa” service.

Authorities did not allow the importation or publication of some books they viewed as critical of the government, Islam, and local culture, as well as books that supported the Muslim Brotherhood or its ideology.

Officials from the Awqaf’s Department of Research and Censorship reviewed religious materials, such as books and DVDs published at home and abroad. The department’s Religious Publications Monitoring Section continued to limit the

publication and distribution of religious literature to texts it considered consistent with moderate interpretations of Islam and placed restrictions on non-Islamic religious publications, such as material that could be considered proselytizing or promoting a religion other than Islam. The section issued permits to print the Quran and reviewed literature on Quranic interpretation. The government continued to prohibit the publication and distribution of literature it believed promoted extremist Islam and overtly political Islam. The Religious Publications Monitoring Section inspected mosques to ensure prohibited publications were not present.

Bookstores in the country carried pro-atheism, anti-organized religion titles by well-known authors in English and Arabic. These stores also sold books on non-Islamic religions.

Customs authorities continued to review the content of imported religious materials and occasionally confiscated some of them.

Dubai's IACAD oversaw licensing of public and private Islamic prayer rooms and prohibited anyone from building, allocating, or modifying a space to be used as a prayer room without prior approval from IACAD.

The JECCs in Dubai and Sharjah continued to regulate Shia worship spaces.

The government continued to grant permission to build houses of worship on a case-by-case basis. Minority religious groups said, however, that the construction of new houses of worship did not keep up with demand from the country's large noncitizen population. Many existing churches continued to face overcrowding and many congregations lacked their own space, resulting in some congregations limiting the frequency of prayer services. Licensed religious groups faced difficulty obtaining additional land or space, despite making such requests to authorities. Some groups in Abu Dhabi complained that women congregants were forced to skip evening services or attend services at smaller churches in residential areas because they did not feel safe in the industrial areas where their churches were located. One group reported resistance from local authorities over its bid for a land plot in a city where it was seeking to expand. Because of the limited capacity of official houses of worship, dozens of religious organizations and different groups shared worship space, sometimes in private homes. In Dubai, overcrowding of the emirate's two church compounds was especially

pronounced and routinely led to congestion and traffic. Some smaller congregations met in private locations or shared space with other churches to which rulers had given land. Noncitizen groups with land grants did not pay rent on the property. Several emirates also continued to provide free utilities for religious buildings.

Noncitizens, who generally made up the entire membership of minority religious groups, relied on grants and permission from local rulers to build houses of worship. For these groups, land titles remained in the respective ruler's name. The country's Christian churches were all built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they were located, including houses of worship for Catholics, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Anglicans, and other denominations. Ajman and Umm al Quwain remained the only emirates without dedicated land for Christian churches, although congregations continued to gather in other spaces, such as hotels, subject to COVID-19 capacity restrictions. There was one Sikh temple in Dubai, built on land provided by the government within a religious complex shared with Christian churches.

In October, one of Dubai's two licensed Hindu temples officially inaugurated a new facility at the religious complex, which trustees of the temple expected to regularly attract and accommodate double the number of worshippers than at the previous site, which will remain open for worshippers. A Hindu temple, scheduled to open in 2024, was also being built on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi on land provided by the government.

The government did not always enforce the prohibition against bell towers and crosses on churches, and some churches in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah displayed crosses on their buildings or had ornamental bell towers; none of them used the towers to ring or chime bells. The church at the government-sponsored Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi features an engraved cross on a pillar.

There continued to be no synagogues for the expatriate resident Jewish population, but regular communal worship took place in hotels on the Sabbath and holidays. During the year, Abu Dhabi continued construction of the country's first purpose-built synagogue as part of the larger government-sponsored Abrahamic Family House project, scheduled to open in 2023, which will bring together a mosque, church, and synagogue to represent the three Abrahamic

faiths on one site. The synagogue was planned to be named for Moses Ben Maimon, the 12th-century philosopher and rabbinical scholar more generally known as Maimonides. The Imam al-Tayeb Mosque and St. Francis (Catholic) Church will also be on-site. The Abrahamic Family House has a pillar in front of each house of worship with religious symbols that are illuminated at night: a menorah, a cross, and a crescent moon.

Although the government permitted non-Muslim groups to raise money from their congregations and from abroad, some unlicensed noncitizen religious groups were unable to open bank accounts because of the lack of a clear legal category to assign the organization. Several religious minority leaders reported the ambiguity created practical barriers to renting space, paying salaries, collecting funds, and purchasing insurance which made it difficult to maintain financial controls and accountability.

Members of unregistered religious organizations stated that their organizations continued to face challenges in renting spaces at hotels. In Abu Dhabi, the DCD continued to require religious functions at hotels be pre-approved and overseen by registered clergy. The government permitted groups that chose not to register to carry out religious functions in private homes as long as these activities did not disturb neighbors through excessive noise or vehicle congestion.

In Dubai, non-Muslim community members reported continued delays in obtaining permits from the CDA to worship in spaces outside of government-designated religious compounds. Community representatives also reported restrictions as well as confusion and uncertainty regarding CDA policies for obtaining licenses and event permits; policies were not published by the CDA. There were also reports of last-minute event cancellations affecting religious groups.

The government continued to provide land for non-Islamic cemeteries. Cremation facilities and associated cemeteries were available for the large Hindu community. Non-Muslim groups said the capacity of crematoriums and cemeteries was generally sufficient to meet demand, although press reporting indicated some strains on capacity during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government required residents and nonresidents to obtain a permit to use cremation facilities, and authorities routinely granted such permits. The

government allowed individuals from all religious groups except Islam to use the crematoriums. Hindu temples also provided cremation services to non-Hindus.

Except in the judiciary and military, non-Muslim religious minorities did not serve in senior federal positions, while among Muslims, Sunnis predominated in these positions, reflecting the country's religious demographics.

Abu Dhabi police directed private security personnel at several camps for laborers to surveil gatherings of laborers and report if they discussed security, social, or religious-related concerns.

Immigration authorities continued to ask foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation on applications, although immigration officers said foreigners, including atheists and agnostics, had the option to leave the field blank. School applications also continued to ask for family religious affiliation in order to distinguish between Muslim students, who were required to take Islamic studies, and non-Muslim students, who were exempt. According to the Ministry of Interior, officials collected the information for demographic statistical analysis.

On December 9, the federal government announced that a federal personal status law for non-Muslim foreigners residing in the country will come into effect nationwide in 2023. The law, which received final government approval in October, will allow for civil marriage, no-fault divorce, joint child custody arrangements, and wills, as it seeks to advance "tolerance, family stability, and demographic diversity," according to the Emirates News Agency. The law will also allow proof of paternity based on marriage or an acknowledgement of paternity. The statute recognizes equality between men and women in court testimony, inheritance, the right to initiate divorce proceedings, and child custody, according to the approved text. Non-Muslim foreigners may agree to instead apply their home countries' laws or other Emirati legislation on family and personal status issues, according to the press. A similar law has been in effect in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi since December 2021.

Religious groups reported official permission was required for any activities held outside their places of worship, including charitable activities, and this permission was sometimes difficult to obtain. Some Muslim and non-Muslim groups

reported their ability to engage in nonreligious charitable activities, such as providing meals or social services, was limited because of government restrictions. The government required groups to obtain permission prior to any fundraising activities.

In a report released in January, the international NGO Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) provided the findings of its study of textbooks and curricula used in the country from 2016 to 2021. IMPACT-se found that “the curriculum teaches that prosperity and national pride are closely associated with peace and tolerance; engagement and cooperation with non-nationals and the world are lauded; textbooks offer a realistic approach to peace and security, teach patriotism, antiradicalism, commitment to defending the homeland, and cooperating with allies; peacemaking is by far the priority. Language and moral education programs encourage cultural diversity, curiosity and happiness.” The report concluded that international standards for peace and tolerance were generally met and stated IMPACT-se’s research did not find antisemitism, hate, or incitement.

The Times of Israel news website reported in November that the Ministry of Education was working with IMPACT-se and Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, to develop Holocaust-related material for its schools.

Prominent government figures routinely acknowledged minority religious holidays and promoted messages of tolerance through various print and media platforms.

On October 24, senior government officials, including the country’s President Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan, tweeted messages of congratulations in Arabic, English, and Hindi on the occasion of the Diwali Hindu festival. The UAE President as well as the country’s Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, wished a Merry Christmas “to our Christian brothers around the world” on social media.

In October, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al-Nahyan attended the inauguration of the new Hindu temple in Dubai and later attended a Diwali festival at the Hindu temple construction site in Abu Dhabi.

On October 26, the Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi and Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy hosted a conference on religious diplomacy. Attendees from a variety of religious faiths gathered to discuss opportunities for religious leaders to advance diplomatic objectives. The conference was conducted under the patronage of the Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence.

The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies' annual meeting took place in Abu Dhabi in November. Over 500 attendees from 60 different countries attended, including religious scholars and leaders from a broad range of faith backgrounds, including Christian and Jewish representatives. The forum was led by prominent Sunni religious scholar, Abdullah bin Bayyah, who was named head of the UAE Fatwa Council in 2018.

On January 27, the government hosted events in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Prominent officials, including the Minister of Culture and Youth, and local media figures participated in the events, which garnered widespread coverage in traditional press and social media.

In September, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan laid a wreath at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

At the Conference of the World Muslim Communities Council in Abu Dhabi in May, the Minister of Tolerance spoke of the importance of shunning "extremism, prejudice, violence, or bias" and of treating others as equals, adding that "tolerance and human fraternity are the keys to social solidarity and unity." In October, the Minister of Tolerance inaugurated a Tolerance Cricket Tournament organized by his ministry for teams of laborers representing labor villages across the country and spoke of the importance of building bridges among social groups of all religions, races, and nationalities and creating an environment in which all are respected.

In April, Dubai's IACAD organized an interfaith iftar that brought together leaders from the Sikh, Bohra, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Coptic communities, touting it as an initiative promoting "human fraternity," and the "first of its kind" in both the UAE and the Gulf.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to non-Muslim groups, there continued to be strong cultural and societal pressure discouraging conversion from Islam and encouraging conversion to Islam, particularly from family members.

According to non-Muslim religious community representatives, there was a high degree of societal tolerance for minority religious beliefs and traditions, particularly for those associated with houses of worship officially recognized by the federal or local governments.

Holiday foods, decorations, posters, and books continued to be widely available during major Christian and Hindu holidays, and Christmas trees and elaborate decorations remained prominent features at malls, hotels, and major shopping centers. Media continued to print reports of religious holiday celebrations, including Christmas festivities and Hindu festivals such as Diwali.

Religious literature, primarily related to Islam, was available in stores. Some bookstores carried the core religious works of other faiths, such as the Bible or Hindu sacred texts.

Private and government-run radio and television stations frequently broadcast Islamic programming, including sermons and lectures; they did not feature similar content for other religious groups.

In some cases, organizations reported that hotels, citing government regulatory barriers, were unwilling to rent space for non-Islamic religious purposes, such as weekly church services.

There continued to be two Hindu temples, both predating the country's independence, in Dubai; one of the two temple communities officially inaugurated a new, larger facility in October at the Jebel Ali religious complex shared by several churches and Dubai's sole Sikh temple. There were no Buddhist temples; some Buddhist groups met in private facilities.

Construction of a new Anglican church in al-Mushrif, Abu Dhabi, remained stalled at 50 percent completion due to financial issues; the completion date was not clear at year's end.

Hend bint Faisal al-Qasimi, a distant member of Sharjah's ruling family, stated in an August 6 Twitter posting that Muslims killed in wars over the past 25 years outnumbered Jews murdered in the Holocaust. She declared that Muslims were able to "forgive and move on," implying that Jews were unable to do so. The following day, criticizing Israeli attacks on Gaza, she tweeted that "the media" were "controlled by you-know-who."

Following the opening of the first kosher restaurant in 2020, kosher food services continued to expand in Dubai. Multiple kosher dining options are available at restaurants and hotels. A joint venture between a local company led by a member of the country's resident Jewish community and Emirates Flight Catering provided kosher airline meals for Emirates and other airlines. The first kosher restaurant in Abu Dhabi opened in May. On December 12, the kosher food store Rimon Market opened in Dubai, establishing itself as "the first kosher supermarket in the Gulf," according to local media. The kosher supermarket joined several kosher restaurants, a mikveh (ritual bath), and a Jewish nursery school as the latest institutions established to meet the needs of the Dubai Jewish community.

In April, following media reports that Rabbi Elie Abadie of Dubai's Jewish community had announced plans for a "dedicated Jewish neighborhood," a prominent Emirati political analyst posted on social media that the creation of a Jewish neighborhood was "strange" and threatened the UAE's social stability that was based on different communities living side by side. According to a Jerusalem Post report, Abadie said that having a dedicated, fully functioning neighborhood will be particularly important on Shabbat, when Orthodox Jews do not drive except in life-threatening emergencies.

In March, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) formally inaugurated its office in Abu Dhabi with the stated goals of strengthening relations between Israel and Arab nations, advancing Arab-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish dialogue, combatting regional antisemitism and extremism, and partnering with Jewish communities in the Middle East to preserve, celebrate, and invigorate Jewish life. In April, the AJC

hosted a joint iftar and Passover celebration in Abu Dhabi. In September, the AJC hosted celebrations to commemorate the second anniversary of the Abraham Accords, with religious leaders from Muslim and non-Muslim organizations attending.

The community of a Sikh gurdwara (a place of worship and assembly) in Dubai organized an interfaith iftar that included participation from Dubai government authorities and religious leaders from various faiths.

On January 27, the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum in Dubai, which houses a memorial exhibition on the Holocaust, commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day by hosting an event featuring Emil Fish, a Holocaust survivor and founder of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Yeshiva University. Separately, the Israeli Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai held a reception commemorating the day. The Crossroads of Civilization Museum also hosted a commemoration of Kristallnacht on November 9, featuring Holocaust survivor Eve Kugler.

In November, the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace invited the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Ephraim Mirvis, to address to a large group of Islamic scholars and leaders. In his speech, Mirvis reminded his audience of the Abrahamic roots shared by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

On May 29, Trends Research and Advisory, a research center in Abu Dhabi, hosted a discussion, “The Role of Religions in Promoting Global Peace.” Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Baha’i speakers participated in the panel, which was held at the Abu Dhabi Book Fair.

On September 24, al-Khaleej newspaper reported that a survey commissioned by the Faith and Media Initiative and conducted by the market research company HarrisX, showed that eight in 10 people (83 percent) in the UAE would like to see “more quality coverage” of religion in the media to break stereotypes. The poll also showed that 78 percent of UAE respondents actively seek religious content in the media. Some 67 percent of those surveyed in the country agreed that there should be more media coverage of complex religious issues.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Chargé d’Affaires, visiting U.S. government officials, and embassy and consulate general officers engaged government officials throughout the year on efforts to support religious diversity, inclusiveness, and tolerance and discussed licensing procedures and regulatory practices involving religious and religiously affiliated groups.

During a March visit to the country, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights joined officials from the UAE and Israel to announce the launch of the Trilateral Religious Coexistence Working Group. The working group is intended to promote tolerance and religious coexistence.

In July, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism met with various government ministers and local stakeholders to discuss religious tolerance and coexistence, and the importance of education in combating antisemitism. The Deputy Special Envoy visited in September for further such meetings.

In November, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom affirmed the United States’ commitment to religious freedom in a keynote speech at the government-hosted Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace.

During the year, visiting senior U.S. government officials, the Chargé d’Affaires, and embassy and consulate general officers regularly met with representatives of religious organizations and other groups associated with minority religious communities, including Christian church leaders, Sikh and Hindu community leaders, Jewish community and diaspora representatives, and the Baha’i and Bohra communities. In the meetings, representatives learned more about issues affecting them as part of continuing efforts to monitor their abilities to freely associate and worship; they discussed the ongoing efforts by different UAE-based groups to accomplish these objectives. The Chargé and embassy and consulate general officers also met with Islamic organizations. In these meetings, U.S. officials discussed the promotion of religious tolerance and emphasized the U.S. government’s commitment to religious freedom.

In April, as part of its Ramadan outreach activities, the embassy and consulate general hosted suhoors (in the UAE, meals following the nighttime isha prayers) and iftars with government, media, religious, business, and cultural figures, including those with an interfaith theme. Remarks by U.S. officials throughout the

year encouraged efforts to build mutual understanding among different religions and cultures. Embassy and consulate general officers also participated in minority religious celebrations, such as Jewish Shabbat services, multiple interfaith events hosted by the Sikh gurdwara, and the opening of the new Hindu temple in Dubai.

To mark Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, the embassy organized a screening of the documentary *Righteous Among the Nations: Lost Stories of the Holocaust in Arab Lands*, followed by a panel discussion, in collaboration with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy.