



## France

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### International Religious Freedom Report 2009

October 26, 2009

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The activities of Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists remained a concern. Some religious groups voiced opposition to legislative proposals that would allow the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and bans the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public employees. The separation of religion and state prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, but there continued to be concerns about the treatment of religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. A 2009 law that would ban religious symbols in public schools by employees and students continued to be implemented during the reporting period. The Government continued to monitor potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-Ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Activities. Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and other groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained a concern and these groups. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minor

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, the Government generally promoted religious freedom. Anti-Semitic acts remained similar to 2007 levels (397 from 386 in 2007), according to the French League for Human Rights (CNCDH). There were 36 violent acts and 99 threats (down from 256 in 2007) directed against individuals or groups. Two incidents, two were explicitly anti-Islamic in nature, targeting mosques. Government leaders, religious representatives, and the media continued to strongly criticize anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government provided increased security for

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#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles and a population of 64,100,000.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to the 2008 *Guide of the Catholic Church* in France, France is 65 percent Catholic, including those who do not attend church regularly.

There are an estimated five million to six million Muslims (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of the number of Muslims vary. According to a January 17, 2008, survey in the Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix*, 39 percent of Muslims surveyed in 2008 had converted to Islam, an increase from 31 percent in 1994. Mosque attendance for Friday prayers rose to 23 percent, up from 16 percent in 1994. In 2008, 60 percent of Muslims compared to 60 percent in 1994.

Protestants make up 2.1 percent of the population, Jewish and Buddhist religious groups 1 percent each, and Sikhs 0.1 percent.

According to French daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, there were approximately 1.5 million Protestants in France in 2008.

According to *La Croix*, there are approximately 500,000 Buddhists in the country, making it the country's fourth-largest religious group. The number of adherents, as it is difficult to distinguish between practicing Buddhists and the much larger number of people who identify with certain Buddhist principles. Scholars distinguish between "sympathizers" (approximately 5,000,000), "associates" (approximately 1,000,000), "practitioners" (approximately 12,000), and "devotees" (approximately 12,000). The largest Buddhist community in France is in the region of Touraine, and two Tibetan monasteries in the Auvergne region have trained the largest number of Buddhist monks. According to 2002 statistical data. In all, there are 300 Buddhist places of worship in the country.





criteria for a religious group to have the legal status of an association of worship. The proposed reform would allow as social events and book selling, thereby "enlarging the social presence" of such groups. The report proposals should encourage a public form of Islam, moderated by social recognition and open practice. On January 24, 2008, managing state relations with the country's religious communities, dismissed much of the uproar surrounding Presi that the Government was only considering reforms that would modernize, not abolish, the 1905 secularism law. All Machelon Report.

The Government made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or crimes against humanity. The Gayssot Act criminalizes questioning the existence of the category of crimes against l The Government combats racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dial groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Conference of Bishops, publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003 a law was passed against crim and in 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these lav

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic c The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations, and serves a purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community.

On January 12, 2009, in the context of the Gaza crisis, State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara called a meeting involved in disadvantaged communities to urge them to combat any "outbreak of anti-Semitism." The groups drafted that was posted on the Internet. On the same day, the Grand Mosque in Paris issued a statement calling for Muslim condemning violence directed at Jewish sites.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes Jewish worship and cultural associations from Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943 Jewish members of the to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful re

The National Council of the Muslim Faith and 25 affiliated regional councils serve as interlocutors for the Muslim community on civil-religious issues as mosque construction, provision of religious leaders for prisons and the military, and certification. Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of the Foundation for Islam to assist in the funding of mosque foreign donations, and assist in training foreign imams in the country's language, history, and civics.

On November 17, 2008, an appeals court in Douai in northern France overturned a lower court's ruling that annulling a bride lied about her virginity. Holding that virginity was not a legal precondition for the marriage, the appeals court was not enough to justify an annulment. The original decision, announced on April 1, 2008, prompted sharp reactions to the role of Islam in the courts. After the November 17 ruling, Lille mayor Martine Aubry issued a statement saying she was consistent with "European conventions for human rights and [was] respectful of the republic's values." The foundation founded by State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara, issued a statement expressing "relief" in response to the

New government-funded construction of mosques was expected to increase in future years in the cities of Marseille and Cergy-Pontoise. According to Ministry of Interior 2008 estimates, there are 1,920 places of Muslim worship in France estimated 5 five million Muslims.

After much negotiation dating back to 2006, a new mosque that will accommodate 2,500 worshippers was slated to be built in Cergy-Pontoise. The Grand Mosque of Marseille, which is estimated to cost \$13.5 million (€10 million) with a scheduled completion in 2010, will include a Qur'anic school, and restaurant open to the public. The project was initially stalled by a legislative disagreement over whether the mosque would have contravened the 1905 law separating church and state.

On December 3, 2008, the Grand Mosque of Creteil (Val-de-Mame) was inaugurated five years after the project was started. The project overcame the complex issue of public financing of religious buildings.

In 2004 Parliament passed a law authorizing the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence." The MIVILUDES is charged by the Government with observing and analyzing "sect" or "cult" movements that constitute

coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by "cults," informing the public about potential risks, and helping presidential decree in 2002 and exists as an independent body in which the Prime Minister appoints the director. Sc publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions. In its sixth annual report (covering 2008) to the Pri MIVILUDES researchers highlighted what they identified as several increasingly pervasive cult-related dangers and from psychological manipulation masquerading as religion. The report indicated that the Government intends to im through multidisciplinary teams led by the Ministry of Interior. The teams, due for activation in late 2009, would ob when necessary based on MIVILUDES' recommendations. The report also devoted an entire chapter to cults' increa through the lobbying of and interaction with international forums including the United Nations and the Organization its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, under the guise of NGOs working to defend religious freedo

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect fo reporting period, but the treatment of minority religious groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained an is

On September 23, 2008, Prime Minister Fillon appointed Georges Fenech the new president of MIVILUDES, replacin Popular Movement (UMP) deputy representing Rhône, is known for his opposition to Scientology, among other grou conducted investigations into Scientology's activities that led to the conviction of several members for second-degr Scientologist spokesperson Daniele Gounord condemned Fenech's selection as "scandalous." Legal counsel for the ( Freedom of Conscience (CAP), an association of minority religions and related organizations of which Scientology is backward step for religious freedom and tolerance in France." Before his appointment as president of MIVILUDES, F 2008 to research sectarian abuses and present a report to the Prime Minister. Fenech's report, "Justice Faced with Minister's Office in June 2008 and outlines 12 recommendations for strengthening judicial efforts to combat sectari European Union rules in this area. CAP legal counsel took issue with the report, questioning Fenech's personal obje tolerance.

Legal counsel for CAP argued that more aggressive application of the About-Picard Law could empower groups host complaints against religious groups, to represent the complainants using their own attorneys, to appear as private attacks on religious minorities as government proxies. CAP legal counsel argued that according the status of "civil p the determination of a criminal case against minority religious groups would violate the impartiality of the tribunal. any association recognized as being of public utility and existing for at least five years with the right to act as a civi physical subjection." Specifically, CAP legal counsel argued that granting this status implies a predetermination tha guilty.

On June 15, 2009, the public prosecutor in a high profile fraud trial against seven of the Church of Scientology's toj Correctional Court to designate Scientology a criminal enterprise that would result in an effective ban in the countr countries. Maud Coujard, the lead prosecutor in the case, recommended that fines of \$2.77 million (€2 million) and the leaders, a Scientology center, and its French bookstores if convicted on charges of organized fraud and illegally complaint made in 1998 by a woman who claimed Scientologists recruited her outside a Paris metro station and mi materials. A judicial decision was expected in the fall. Fenech noted that if the court upholds the prosecutor's recon dissolution of other structures of the [Scientology] movement in France."

The 2009 MIVILUDES report on dangerous "sects and cults" referred to Jehovah's Witnesses 13 times in connector Witnesses report that during the Europe one radio interview about the report's release, Amélie Cladière, the MIVILL beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and insinuated sectarian practices." Jehovah's Witnesses report frequent denial of re worship, literature, and programs of the sort granted to other religious groups that society views as mainstream.

On December 15, 2008, a legal challenge to the law banning the wearing of ostensible religious signs in public schc United Nations Human Rights Committee. A similar legal challenge was also filed by United Sikhs lawyers on May 3 Rights (ECHR). Preceding these motions was a December 2007 French Conseil d'Etat ruling that upheld the legal ba legal challenges by United Sikhs lawyers relate to the expulsion in 2004 of six Sikh boys for wearing the "keski" (ar 2007 ruling maintained that the "keski" was not a discreet sign but an ostensible manifestation of religion, which is interest of secularism in public schools that the permanent expulsion of a student who does not conform to the leg; not lead to an excessive infringement on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." The United Sikhs and Frenc

court that the expulsion had infringed upon articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which and the right not to be discriminated against, respectively. At the end of the reporting period, the United Nations H rendered a decision on the legal challenges.

On December 15, 2008, in addition to the motion filed above, United Sikhs lawyers also filed a legal challenge before Ranjit Singh and Shingara Singh regarding the Government's refusal to issue a resident card and passport because their identification photos. At the end of the reporting period, a decision had not been rendered in this case.

On November 27, 2008, Shingara Mann Singh from Sarcelles, who refused to remove his turban as required when a legal challenge before the ECHR. ECHR judges ruled unanimously that French regulations prohibiting head covering constitute interference within the right of the freedom of religion. The Court held that while Singh's religious rights justifiably banned wearing the turban specifically in the driver's license photo on the grounds that the turban cover fraud and falsification.

In December 2008 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, asked the wearing of religious symbols in schools. There were no reports that the Government reviewed the 2004 law that asked the Government to reconsider the law. For example, in 2007 she noted several areas of concern, particularly symbols in schools, which may "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious beliefs. headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In 1996 a parliamentary commission studying "cults" publicly released a report that identified 173 groups as "cults, Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity. Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved.

At the end of the reporting period, Catherine Picard, chairwoman of the National Union of Associations for the Protection was in the process of appealing a decision against her rendered by the Appeals Court of Rouen on July 18, 2007, following a 2007 decision, the Court fined Picard \$10,125 (€6,750) to be paid to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The ECHR had not ruled on the appeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses whose 2002 court ruling to pay taxes on donations group's assets. The Jehovah's Witnesses were appealing the Court of Cassation's first and only decision to tax donations case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Senior government officials, up to and including President Sarkozy, strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance

On June 7, 2009, the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, designated the Dalai Lama an Honorary Citizen of the city.

Twenty-five students attended the Catholic Institute's Master's-level degree program entitled "Religion, Secularism, foreign imams and 15 military chaplains. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the program in February 2008. The program addresses the fact that most of the approximately 1,200 imams preaching in the country hindering communication with their congregations and their understanding of local customs and laws. Initiated in 2008, which the Government provides 60 percent of funding, is intended to provide students, including future clerics, a better social norms while avoiding theology per se. The goal is to develop an Islam within the country that will be of the country's

instruction is left to the Paris mosque, which has administered a four-year imam training program since 1993. The sub-Saharan Africa. The training, which focuses on imams, has been well-received by the country's religious officials and clergy from all religions, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations.

On April 7, 2009, the Ministry of Interior confirmed the expulsion of an imam for making anti-Semitic remarks during Paris to future imams. Abdessamad Merimi, a Moroccan citizen who preached in the Paris suburb of Grigny, made a lecture on Judaism during the training. Fellow students, shocked by Merimi's remarks, immediately notified the director.

On September 22, 2008, the criminal affairs director from the Ministry of Justice sent a request to public prosecutors in their areas. The request followed the July 2007 announcement by the Justice Ministry of the creation of 100 posts in district courts and staffed by a referring judge charged with managing local cases in close collaboration with civil society. Staffing each of these posts with an attorney specially trained in handling cases involving racial or religious discrimination was released in the 2008 criminal policy report, which at the end of the reporting period had not been published.

On September 15, 2008, against a backdrop of rising crime in the 19th district, the police announced new initiatives to protect acts of worship. After a meeting with Jewish groups, law enforcement officials announced the launch of a telephone hotline for acts.

At the end of the reporting period, the CNCDH report listed several new government antidiscrimination initiatives and promotions, among them a day-long seminar during which 1,710 security professionals had been trained by the end of the year with the public. Further, a guide written by the independent High Authority for the Fight against Discrimination and is given to all law enforcement personnel and made available through the intranet.

At the end of 2008, the Interior Ministry reported a positive trend in "unacceptable or shocking" content as measured down from the 2007 number. (The 2007 number is reported first/The 2008 number second.): 671/77 such messages were discriminatory. Among the 671/77 received messages, 324/8 were discriminatory or xenophobic; 297/53 provoked crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; 17/8 denied crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; and 17/8 orientation.

In 2008 150 local police stations were evaluated using anonymous checks to verify that officers were treating citizens as victims of discrimination, with the requisite care and attention.

The Education Ministry continued to sponsor nationwide topics and competitive examinations designed to educate students in districts of Aix-Marseille, in the South, created and implemented teams to train school officials and teachers regarding

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

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the reporting period, prominent societal leaders and maintain open lines of communication among different faith communities.

The CNCDH, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported that 2008 witnessed a leveling in anti-Semitic acts reported also remained level in 2008--100 acts, and 106 in 2007, although the number of violent ones was in a positive direction. Reported anti-Semitic violence in schools declined, from five acts in 2007 to two in 2008. The CNCDH asserted that contrary to previous years, international events, particularly Middle East tensions, had a profound influence on the reaction to the conflict in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009.

The CNCDH noted that its statistical totals for violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008 differed somewhat from the totals of the Community (SPCJ), which reported 100 violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008. CNCDH statisticians pointed out that the "counting" events whereas the SPCJ "counts" the number of complaints lodged. In the case of one attack involving multiple victims, different approaches lead to different totals. The CNCDH plans in future reports to distinguish between events and victims to

According to the CNCDH report, there was a 5 percent increase in instances of anti-Semitic violence committed by individuals up from 2007. Authorities attributed 11 percent of these assaults to members of extreme right movements and gar

The 100 violent anti-Semitic acts registered in 2008 involved 53 acts of physical assault, 26 of damage to personal cemetery or memorial vandalism, four of damage to professional space, two of school vandalism, and two of defacement. Numerous reports of anti-Semitic slurs and the misuse of the word "Jew" as an insult that the Jewish community found offensive.

Prosecutors were ordered to seek maximum punishments for hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not exceeding 10 years.

On May 22, 2009, the Government announced that since 1999, it had paid \$569 million (€410 million) through the Victims of Despoilment (CIVS) to victims despoiled in the country during German occupation in World War II.

On May 20, 2009, the Ministry of Interior announced it was seeking to dissolve a "Tribe-K" front-group known as the "Tribe K" which authorities accuse of promoting racial and religious violence. On April 3, 2009, the Paris Court of Appeals sentenced the disbanded radical anti-Semitic group "Tribe K," to an eight-month suspended prison sentence for spreading anti-Semitism in 2006. Seba wrote on his website that international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other organizations "run by Zionists who impose living conditions on Africa and the African Diaspora that are so extreme they seem like heaven on earth." He was charged with libel, incitation to racial hatred, and contesting crimes against humanity.

On May 15, 2009, a Nanterre court sent to correctional court six individuals arrested in February 2008 for physical assault on a Jewish man in Bagneux. The victim was held against his will by his attackers for nine and a half hours before being set free by the police.

On May 3, 2009, during a program on Radio J, a Jewish community radio station, President Sarkozy's General Secretary announced a controversial comic Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala to field an "anti-Zionist" electoral list for the European elections on June 4. Jewish Representatives of President Sarkozy's office asked the Ministries of Justice and the Interior to find a way to prevent the list from being on air, but these efforts were unsuccessful due to constitutional concerns. Persons on Dieudonné's "Anti-Zionist" list failed to win seats in the elections.

On April 29, 2009, 27 members belonging to the self-styled "Gang of Barbarians" went on trial in the torture-murder case of a Jewish youth who was kidnapped in January 2006 in the Paris suburb of Sceaux. He was held hostage and tortured on railroad tracks in Saint-Genevieve-des-Bois. Halimi died of his injuries while being transported to the hospital. Despite the involvement of Jewish institutions, the trial was held behind closed doors because two of the accused were under 18 at the time of the crime. Gang leader Youssouf Fofana faced life imprisonment if convicted. He was alleged to have admitted he committed the crime.

On December 26, 2008, Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala sparked a firestorm of criticism for giving a fictitious award to Holocaust survivor Herta and Paul Amirani. Through a stagehand dressed as a WWII-era Jewish deportee wearing a yellow star of David, Dieudonné presented the award. "Insolence" at the end of his show at the Zenith theater in Paris. The event was applauded by the more than 5,000 fans in attendance from the political far-left and far-right, including former National Front presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. Numerous Jewish organizations, including the CRIF, and Minister of Culture Christine Albanel, condemned the event. Dieudonné has been regularly criticized for his anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric that incites racial or ethnic hatred, both of which are illegal in the country. He was facing a judicial inquiry for desecration of graves. Paris prosecutor's office on December 29, 2008, opened a preliminary investigation into the matter. The investigation is ongoing. If convicted, Dieudonné faced a maximum six-month prison term and a \$30,000 fine.

On October 22, 2008, two Jewish teenagers were attacked in Vitry-sur-Seine by 10 youth. Six persons were arrested and charged with assault.

On September 6, 2008, three Jewish teenage boys were attacked in the 19th district of Paris in what police authorities initially described as a hate crime, however, upon further investigation it appeared to be gang-related. Police investigators said the victims were wearing yarmulkes during the time of the incident. Six aggressors allegedly beat the teenagers, with two of the three victims hospitalized. That five youths, including two minors, were under investigation for "voluntary violence as a group," without including a hate crime. One officer told the press that the incident appeared to have been a low-level clash among neighborhood teenagers.

On August 13, 2008, Paris police detained the owner and sales clerk of a woman's clothing store, Belle Star, in the 11th district for bearing the WWII-era Nazi prohibition, "Park Entry Forbidden to Jews." The store owner and her daughter face up to 10 years in prison and a fine for hatred for promulgating anti-Semitic inscriptions. The case was ongoing.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced a killing, and instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism which, according to the CNCDH, there were 97 racist and xenophobic (including anti-Muslim) acts recorded, a more than 50% increase from 2007. The trend was also reflected in a drop in the number of violent incidents from 614 in 2007 to 514 in 2008.

committed against individuals of North African origin, and two of the acts were characterized as being specifically a

The 97 racist and xenophobic violent acts reported to the CNCDH in 2008 involved 54 acts of physical assaults, sev  
of mosque vandalism, 19 of damage to personal property, two of damage to public buildings, six of damage to prof  
370 racist and xenophobic threats and less serious material damage (usually defacement by graffiti) reported to th  
(including by telephone) threats made to individuals, 215 acts of graffiti on private property or vehicles, and 18 prc

On September 8, 2008, a Muslim youth was shot and killed in Paris' 19th district. Mao Peninou, security advisor to  
security in the district, noting that this was the first killing with a gun in the district since 2001.

On December 20, 2008, a mosque in Saint-Priest (a suburb of Lyon) was the target of arson. Although the building  
the blaze, several copies of the Qur'an were burned. Police were searching for the perpetrators. Approximately 1,0  
the mosque on December 21, including prominent Socialist Party mayor of Lyon, Gerar Collomb, the rector of the c  
leaders--to denounce anti-Muslim sentiment and actions in the country. Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie annou  
"all means necessary" to solve the case.

On December 17, 2008, 10 members of the Neo-Nazi group "LW" were convicted for the April 20 Colombiers mosqi  
members received 18-month prison sentences, while two of the group's leaders each received a maximum three-ye  
to pay fines totaling \$25,025 (€17,500) to the Muslim community and an anti-racist group.

On December 9, 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy denounced as "revolting" and "repugnant" racism directed agains  
to the desecration of Muslim and Jewish graves with swastikas and anti-Islamic slogans at Arras military cemetery  
of the Eid al-Adha holiday. Politicians and religious organizations also roundly condemned the attack, and the Secre  
announced the installation of eight video cameras in the cemetery.

On September 10, 2008, two neo-Nazi youth were put under investigation for their alleged role in an earlier desecr  
charged for the profanation of a sepulture for reasons of race or religion and for the degradation of property belong

On September 4, 2008, approximately 40 swastikas and 50 racist slogans, such as "death to Arabs," "white power,  
painted inside the entrance at Rene Cassin d'Agde high school outside of Montpellier. School officials shielded incon  
and canceled classes for the day. French Minister of Education Xavier Darcos firmly condemned the incident and rei  
extremism and racism. Local Socialist Party leaders and French anti-racist organizations joined Darcos in condemni

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Islamic headscarves may have led to incidents of discriminati  
community again alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were refused service by private businesses. Media  
female employees from wearing the headscarf or encouraged them to wear a bandanna instead.

On December 4, 2008, two French Muslim schoolgirls in Caen, who were expelled for refusing to remove their head  
case brought before the ECHR. While the ECHR judges were sympathetic to the girls, stating that wearing a religiou  
secularism, the judges concluded that, according to Article 9 (freedom of thought and religion) of the European Cor  
not expel the two girls due to their religion; rather, authorities expelled them for not conforming to the rules set fo  
rules governing the public order preempt the protection of personal liberty.

On September 4, 2008, six Muslim schoolgirls were sent home by schoolmaster Eric Rottier of the Lislet Geoffroy, a  
violating the 2004 law that forbids wearing religious symbols in public places. Two of the girls returned to school or  
The four others left the school, opting to continue their studies via correspondence courses with a Qur'anic school ii

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination during the reporti  
the growing body of precedent-setting case law from the ECHR in order to contest what they regarded as unequal t

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported 55 acts of vandalism against places of worship in the  
directed at Jehovah's Witnesses' property. Jehovah's Witnesses' officials noted that of the 55 attacks during the rep  
were engaging in door-to-door proselytizing.

The Jehovah's Witnesses awaited a ruling during the reporting period by the ECHR on the admissibility of a case concerning donations at a 60 percent tax rate. The government had imposed the high rate relative to other religious groups and assessed tax, which totaled more than \$77.5 million (€57 million) would consume all of the group's buildings and a

On October 1, 2008, between 600 and 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses rallied in front of the departmental government concerning the allegations and the demonstration arose from a property dispute in the Vosges town of Deyvilliers (1,400 inhabitants) planning to build a large church (or Kingdom Hall). A local environmental group, Aded, has lobbied since 2004 against the project, which would include a 500-car-space parking lot. In an apparent effort to rally public opinion, Aded organized a public meeting with a Jehovah's Witness, Bill Bowen, who is an outspoken critic of the faith. Media reported that at the meeting, Bowen was speaking about ignoring alleged sexual abuse of minors within the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three seven-member delegations representing the Protestant churches, in addition, a three-member delegation represents the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represents the Anglican Church for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian churches which addresses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In March 2009 Rabbi Michel Serfaty, coPresident of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association, traveled to Gaza with Halter in an effort to strengthen relations and dialogue for peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Rabbi Serfaty's visit was aimed at understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts, and by sponsoring international trips.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Representatives from the Embassy met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters. The Embassy also met with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved with religious freedom. Embassy officials met with representatives from the major faith traditions as well as representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Unified Church of Christ. Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the CRIF, the European Jewish Museum, the United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center. The Embassy also conducted regular outreach activities. The Ambassador hosted an annual Iftar with a focus on young Muslim leaders. Farah Pandith, Senior Advisor for Outreach, led the outreach. The Embassy also hosted the visit of a prominent American imam who provided a leadership example for the Muslim community.

The Embassy conducts a robust public affairs outreach program to minority communities throughout the country. The program includes projects of reputable NGOs that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, such as SOS Racisme.

The Embassy's International Visitor Leadership Program during the reporting period, in part due to special program funding, provided opportunities for other minority community leaders from throughout the country. The Youth Ambassadors Program, now in its second year, is related to social entrepreneurship for youth leaders in underserved communities.

The Embassy partners with the country's leaders in a range of sectors to share best practices for managing diversity and working with different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to live harmoniously.