

# LIECHTENSTEIN 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most cases involved Muslim immigrants who suffered verbal harassment. Other examples included right wing or anti-Semitic graffiti and Internet websites disseminating discriminatory rhetoric.

During discussions with government officials, the U.S. ambassador and embassy officers encouraged the promotion of religious freedom. Visiting U.S. officials and U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom issues with government representatives.

## Section I. Religious Demography

According to the National Office of Statistics, the country's population is 36,500 and religious group membership by percentage is as follows: Roman Catholic (76 percent); Protestant (7.6); Muslim (5.4); no formal religious group (2.8); Christian Orthodox (1.1); other religious groups (1.7); and no religious affiliation (5.4).

The great majority of Muslims are Sunnis, predominately from Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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

### Legal/Policy Framework

There is no distinct separation between church and state. The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The criminal code prohibits any form of discrimination against or debasement of any religion or its adherents. According to the constitution, Roman Catholicism is the state religion "with full protection from the state." As such, it receives higher government subsidies than other religious organizations, holds a guaranteed role in education and religious

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teaching in schools, and has a voice in the political and legal decision-making process.

Funding for religious institutions comes from the municipalities and from the general budget, according to parliamentary decisions. The government provides Catholic and Protestant churches annual contributions in proportion to membership; smaller religious groups are eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. The two main representative bodies of the Muslim community (the Islamische Gemeinschaft and the Tuerkischer Verein) are collaborating with the government to establish an umbrella organization that receives state contributions to be used equitably for all Muslims residing in the country. The Umbrella Organization for Islamic communities of Eastern Switzerland (DIGO) also represents Muslim interests in the country. All religious groups have tax-exempt status.

Religious education is part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic or Protestant religious education is compulsory in all primary schools, but the authorities routinely grant exemptions for children whose parents request them. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. The municipalities of Balzers, Triesen, and Planken supervise most closely. Some primary schools offer Islamic education.

At the secondary school level, parents and students choose between traditional confessional education their religious community organizes and a “Religion and Culture” course. The government provides financial support to some smaller denominations that choose to offer religious education classes at their churches outside regular school hours.

To receive a religious worker visa, applicants must have completed theological studies, be a member of a nationally recognized religious group, and be sponsored by a registered member of the official religious group’s clergy. The Immigration and Passport Office normally processes visa requests for religious workers. The government subsequently issues residency permits.

The government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and one short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government grants short-term residency permits primarily to the imams of the Turkish Association and other foreign Muslim institutions who agree not to allow or preach sermons that incite violence or advocate intolerance.

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The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Candlemas, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, The Nativity of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Saint Stephen's Day. Assumption Day (August 15) is celebrated as National Day.

### Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

In 2011, the government announced it would provide three Roman Catholic chapels in three different parishes for Muslims to hold funeral services. Two chapels (one in the parish of Eschen and one in the parish of Mauren) were inaugurated during the year, with a third expected to open in the parish of Ruggell in 2013. There is no Muslim cemetery or mosque in the country. The Muslim community owns two prayer rooms. During the year, eight primary schools offered Islamic education taught in German to 70 students between the ages of seven and 13.

During the year, a total of five residency permits were granted to religious workers.

On January 25, the government held a public Holocaust memorial ceremony at the Liechtenstein National Museum. Several high-ranking politicians and diplomats gave speeches, including Prime Minister Klaus Tschuetscher. As part of the commemoration, the government co-sponsored a photographic exhibition in Tyrol, Austria, on Albanian Muslims who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

The government commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 with a special memorial hour. This event was part of the government's program to fight racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination.

Since 2003, secondary schools have held discussion forums on the Holocaust to mark the Day of Remembrance. In February and October, the International School for Holocaust Studies and the International Tracing Service (ITS) provided training and materials to interested teachers. During the year, Eschen's high school included Shoah education in the curriculum and several teachers coordinated related events with other schools.

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

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There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, Catholics, Protestants, and members of other religious groups worked well together on a cooperative basis. Differences among religious groups were not a significant source of tension in society.

The government's Equal Opportunity Office received no complaints of religious discrimination during the year. However, the government's racism monitoring report noted increased collaborative efforts between local and foreign racist groups that also posted discriminatory and anti-Semitic rhetoric on online platforms.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts against persons or property. The country's Jewish community consists of 26 people and there is no formal organizational structure. The Association of the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem represents the Jewish community's interests. There are no synagogues or Jewish cemeteries in the country.

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

U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom issues with the Office of Foreign Affairs.