

GERMANY 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The Basic Law (the constitution) provides for freedom of faith and conscience and the practice of one's religion. Some state governments and federal agencies continued to decline to recognize certain belief systems as religions, in particular Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists, making them ineligible for tax benefits. Some Muslim religious groups did gain recognition, signing accords with state governments. Non-recognition did not affect the ability of adherents to engage in public and private expressions of their faith. Federal and state Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (OPCs) monitored the activities of some groups, including the Church of Scientology (COS) and some Muslim groups suspected of furthering what the offices considered extremist goals. Government leaders participated in rallies and spoke out against anti-Semitism following the use of anti-Semitic slogans in protests against Israeli actions during the conflict in Gaza. They also participated in demonstrations supporting moderate Islam.

Anti-Semitic speech and actions increased, especially in the summer when there were numerous protest demonstrations against the Gaza conflict. Leading politicians, celebrities, and media representatives spoke out against anti-Semitism and in favor of moderate Islam. Members of civil society, including the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, the Turkish community, and prominent Jewish groups, held public rallies against intolerance and extremist violence, and promoted tolerance programs and efforts to improve Muslim integration. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches continued to use "sect commissioners" to warn the public of alleged dangers from some religious groups such as the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, Universal Life, and Transcendental Meditation practitioners. Some employers continued to use written agreements known as "sect filters," asking potential new employees to confirm they had no contact with Scientology. There was vandalism against synagogues, mosques, and a Coptic church.

The U.S. embassy and consulates general closely monitored the government's responses to incidents of anti-Semitism, and expressed the U.S. government's concern about anti-Semitic acts. In various meetings throughout the year with government officials, members of parliament, and religious groups, embassy representatives encouraged direct dialogue between representatives of the government and law enforcement and representatives of minority religious groups. The embassy engaged Muslim communities through public outreach, exchanges,

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and other programs promoting religious tolerance. The embassy maintained dialogue with minority religious groups, including the Hindu, Buddhist, Bahai, Alevi Muslim, Coptic Christian, and Sufi Muslim communities, and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to promote diversity and greater understanding among religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to a July 2014 U.S. government estimate, the total population is 81 million. There are no official statistics on religious groups. Unofficial estimates and figures provided by religious groups indicate the Roman Catholic Church has approximately 24.2 million members and the Protestant Church (defined as a confederation of the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant denominations) has approximately 23.6 million members. Together, these two churches account for more than 60 percent of the population. Other Protestant denominations include the New Apostolic Church, Baptist communities (Evangelical Christian Baptists, International Baptist Convention, Reformed Baptists, Bible Baptists, and others), and evangelical nondenominational Baptists. These other Protestant denominations combined account for less than 1 percent of the population. Orthodox Christians number approximately 1.5 million.

According to estimates, there are approximately 4-4.5 million Muslims, approximately 5 percent of the population. This includes approximately 2.64 million Sunnis; 500,000 Alevis; and 225,500 Shia. The country's Jewish population is estimated at between 112,000 and 250,000. Other religious groups include Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the COS. Roughly 28 million persons (33 percent of the population) either have no religious affiliation or are members of unrecorded religious groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The Basic Law provides for freedom of faith and conscience and the freedom to profess a religious creed and practice one's religion. The Basic Law also prohibits a state church. As provided in the Basic Law, religious groups are not required to register with the state, and groups may organize themselves for private religious purposes without constraint. Religious groups wishing to qualify as nonprofit associations with tax exempt status must register.

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State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status; if challenged, their decisions are subject to judicial review. Groups applying for tax-exempt status must provide evidence through their statutes, history, and activities that they are a religious group.

A special partnership exists between the state and religious groups with “public law corporation” (PLC) status, as outlined in the Basic Law. Any religious group may request PLC status, which entitles the group to appoint prison, hospital, and military chaplains and to levy tithes (averaging 9 percent of income tax), which the state collects on its behalf. PLCs pay fees to the government for the tithing service, but not all groups use it. PLC status also allows for tax exemptions and representation on supervisory boards of public television and radio stations.

According to the Basic Law, the decision to grant PLC status is made at the state level. Individual states base PLC status decisions on a number of qualifications including an assurance of the group’s permanence, size, and respect for the constitutional order and fundamental rights of individuals. An estimated 180 religious groups have PLC status, including the Protestant and Catholic churches, the Jewish community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army. Thirteen of the 16 federal states have granted the Jehovah’s Witnesses PLC status. Although some Alevite groups have obtained PLC status, no other Muslim communities have PLC status. The COS does not have PLC status in any state.

Various laws at the federal and state levels have an impact on certain religious practices. Animal protection laws prohibit the killing of animals without anesthesia, which is part of some halal and kosher ritual slaughter practices, although some exceptions exist. For example, in Hesse a Federal Administrative Court decision allows for slaughter without anesthesia if trained personnel conduct the slaughter in a registered slaughterhouse under observation of the local veterinary inspection office and the meat will be purchased only by members of religious communities requiring slaughter without anesthesia.

The law allows circumcision of males including children, as long as it is performed in a medically professional manner and without unnecessary pain.

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Currently, eight states maintain headscarf bans – and in some cases bans of any religious symbol – for teachers in public schools. In some states, these bans are extended to all civil servants. Courts have upheld headscarf bans in several cases.

The criminal code prohibits inciting disturbances of the public order by insulting faiths, religious societies, and ideological groups. Infractions are punishable by up to three years in prison and a fine.

State governments subsidize religiously affiliated institutions providing public services, such as religious schools and hospitals.

Although the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, a Federal Constitutional Court ruling permits the government to characterize “nontraditional” religious groups as “sects,” “youth religions,” and “youth sects,” and allows the government to provide “accurate information” or warnings about them to the public. The ruling prohibits the government from defaming these religious groups by using terms such as “destructive,” “pseudo-religious,” or “manipulative.”

All states offer religious instruction and ethics courses in public schools. Most public schools offer Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in cooperation with those churches, as well as instruction in Judaism if enough students (usually 12, although regulations vary state to state) express an interest. In most states, students who do not wish to participate in religious instruction may substitute ethics courses. State authorities generally permit religious groups to establish private schools as long as they meet basic curriculum requirements. The Basic Law states “[t]he entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state.” Schooling is mandatory with no provision for homeschooling, including for parents who want to homeschool for religious reasons.

Government Practices

Some state governments and federal agencies continued to decline to recognize certain belief systems as religions, in particular Jehovah’s Witnesses and Scientologists, making them ineligible for tax benefits. Some Muslim religious groups gained PLC status. The government continued to investigate Scientologists and Muslim groups for reported constitutional violations. The headscarf ban prevalent in many states was upheld in court. Scientologists continued to report instances of alleged governmental discrimination, such as the use of “sect filters”

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to block them from public sector employment. Government leaders participated in rallies and spoke out against anti-Semitism following protests against Israeli actions in Gaza. They also participated in demonstrations supporting moderate Islam.

On August 6, police arrested six sympathizers of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant from Chechnya for assaulting and stabbing five Yezidis in Herford, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). A subsequent violent clash involved more than 300 people and resulted in injuries and damage to property. When police searched an additional 86 suspects, they located multiple weapons, including a firearm. The NRW state security commissioner investigated 31 cases; legal action remained ongoing at the end of the year.

The states of Bremen and Baden-Wuerttemberg continued to deny PLC status to Jehovah's Witnesses, and the group's application in NRW, filed in 2006, remained pending. The Jehovah's Witnesses were reportedly unable to alleviate concerns over the perceived divergence of their views from constitutional principles. For example, states considered the opposition of Jehovah's Witnesses to blood transfusions for children to be incompatible with constitutional protections for the rights of the child. Jehovah's Witnesses suspended their lawsuit filed at the regional court in Stuttgart to obtain PLC status, pending a decision by the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe on a similar case filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses of Bremen.

In May the Hamburg city-state government became the second state after Hesse to grant PLC status to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Muslim community, the first Muslim community in Hamburg to be granted this status.

In October Bremen signed an agreement with the resident Alevi community similar to its January 2013 agreement with other Muslim social and cultural organizations. The agreement did not grant PLC status to the group, but it codified constitutional and legal rights and obligations in the relationship between Bremen and the community.

The status of the COS remained unresolved. No court at the state or federal level issued any ruling determining whether Scientology was a religion.

The federal and state OPCs in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, NRW, and Thuringia monitored the activities of the

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COS, reportedly focusing on evaluating Scientology publications and public activities to determine whether they violated the constitution. The COS reported OPC representatives regularly contacted Scientologists to question them about the organization. The COS also reported the OPC collected names of members from church publications and archived the information to use in citizenship and employment proceedings.

Federal and state OPCs continued to observe a number of Muslim groups the OPCs suspected of furthering extremist goals. One example was the Muslim Brotherhood, with 1,300 members, whose ideology the OPCs considered to be “socially disintegrative.” The OPCs also suspected the 30,000-member Milli Gorus Islamic Community, an organization of the Turkish diaspora, of spreading an Islamic doctrine rejecting democracy. In May the Federal Administrative Court confirmed the Federal Interior Ministry’s ban of “DawaFFM,” an Islamic extremist group in Frankfurt, and its subsidiary, the Dar al Schabab international youth group, for activities that were unconstitutional and counter to international peace and understanding. In May the NRW OPC’s annual report stated that 20 of the 850 mosque communities in NRW were leaning towards Salafism, which authorities considered to be anti-constitutional because of its call for the imposition of a strict interpretation of sharia.

On September 24, the Federal Labor Court ruled that it was legally permissible for a Protestant run hospital in NRW to ban the wearing of a headscarf as a symbol of the Islamic faith. The case was brought by a nurse, a convert to Islam, who had previously worked at the hospital without a headscarf but declared her intent to do so when she returned from maternity leave. When the hospital denied her permission to wear the headscarf, the nurse did not return to work. Instead, she filed suit and demanded the hospital pay her salary. In its decision, the court stated that church institutions did not have to allow their employees to wear the symbols of another faith. The case was returned to the NRW State Labor Court to determine the extent to which the hospital was a church institution.

In March a court in Lower Saxony ordered a recruiting agent who had refused to refer a Muslim applicant for employment because of her headscarf to pay 2,000 euros (\$2,433) in compensation.

On October 21, the family court in Bavaria upheld the removal of six children of members of the Twelve Tribes religious community in Klosterzimmern from the custody of their parents and placed them in foster care. Bavarian authorities had

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taken the six children into protective custody in September 2013, along with 36 other children, in response to allegations of child abuse due to the community's practice of corporal punishment, a practice not sanctioned by federal law. In court, at least one of the families cited Christian scripture to argue that their actions were faith-based. Following the custody ruling, some of the parents expressed their intent to file an appeal with the regional appeals court in Nuremberg. Since the raid, authorities have returned some of the other children (mostly infants and children over 15) to their parents.

In August the Frankfurt Regional Court decided on appeal that parents who had refused to send their four children to school for religious reasons could be subject to a fine, but concluded that the situation did not justify a lower court's decision in 2013 to assume legal custody of the children.

The Higher Frankfurt Regional Court continued to consider an appeal from parents whose request to homeschool their children on religious grounds was rejected by the Kassel Regional Court in Hesse in October 2013. The family had alleged mandatory school attendance exposed the children to pornographic images during sex education classes.

On February 28, the Minden Administrative Court ruled that a Catholic elementary school was entitled to request that students of other denominations attend Catholic religion classes and school Masses. The court also said the school could reject admission of a child if the parents refused to allow their child to attend the religion classes and Masses.

The number of Islamic religion classes in public schools continued to grow. Education, including religious instruction and curriculum, remained under the authority of the individual states. There was no nationally recognized Islamic group to assist in developing a curriculum or providing services, leaving the form and content of Islamic instruction to vary from state to state. States with existing programs, such as Baden-Wuerttemberg and Hessen, announced plans to expand the offerings of Islamic religious classes to additional grade levels and schools. Many states cooperated with Muslim communities by forming advisory councils as they expanded their course offerings. The Alevi community offered religious lessons in schools in seven federal states for approximately 1,500 students. Curricula were usually developed in cooperation with the respective state governments. NRW was the first state to offer Alevi religious lessons in secondary schools.

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Scientologists continued to report instances of alleged governmental discrimination. “Sect filters” asking potential employees to confirm they had no contact with Scientologists and rejected its doctrines remained in use in the public and private sectors, although courts at the state and federal level had said it was improper to use them to blacklist Scientologists.

On March 12, the city of Stuttgart required a tree expert hired to train park employees on tree care to sign a “sect filter.” The expert agreed he would not utilize Scientology methods, but crossed out the language stating that he rejected such methods and had not been trained in them. After he would not sign the full agreement, the city cancelled its contract with the expert, who then filed a lawsuit against the city for damages to recover his loss of income. The case was pending before the Stuttgart Superior Court at the end of the year.

On January 27, the Cologne Regional Court sentenced eight members of the neo-Nazi group Rade Circle of Friends to sentences that ranged from six months’ probation to two-and-a-half years in prison for membership in a criminal organization, assault, and property damage. The group had distributed Hitler stickers and flyers with the phrase, “Jews are our misfortune,” among other actions.

Leaders from state and federal government, including President Joachim Gauck, Chancellor Angela Merkel, and several cabinet ministers, condemned anti-Semitic incidents during the summer and called for zero tolerance of anti-Semitism.

On July 22, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier issued a joint statement with the French and Italian foreign ministers declaring anti-Semitism “cannot be tolerated in our societies in Europe. We strongly condemn the outrageous anti-Semitic statements, demonstrations and attacks in our countries in recent days...Nothing, including the dramatic military confrontation in Gaza, justifies any such transgressions in Europe. We will do the utmost – jointly and in our countries – to make sure that all our fellow citizens can continue to live in peace and security.”

On September 14, President Gauck, Chancellor Merkel, almost all cabinet ministers, and party caucus chiefs attended a rally of approximately 6,000 persons against anti-Semitism organized by the Central Council of Jews in Germany at the Brandenburg Gate in central Berlin. Key representatives of the Catholic and Protestant churches and the Central Council of Muslims in Germany also attended.

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The chancellor condemned all forms of anti-Semitism, stating that an attack on Jews or Jewish institutions was an attack on German society and culture as a whole.

On September 19, Interior Minister de Maiziere in Hanover, and Commissioner for Integration State Minister Aydan Ozoguz in Munich, along with several leading politicians in other cities, participated in Muslim protests against hatred and violence and in support of Islam's peaceful nature.

On August 28, the Berlin police confirmed that an August 11 fire at the Mevlana mosque was arson and set up a task force to investigate the attack. Political leaders from the federal and state levels visited the mosque to express solidarity and condemn the attack.

The government continued to subsidize some religious groups for historical and cultural reasons. An agreement between the federal government and the Central Council of Jews provided supplemental funding to the Jewish community to help maintain Jewish cultural heritage, restore the Jewish community, and support integration and social work. The federal government continued to cover 50 percent of maintenance costs for Jewish cemeteries. State governments also accepted an ongoing obligation to provide financial support to the Jewish community, including renovating old synagogues and constructing new ones. State and local police units continued to provide security measures around synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

Since 2012 the federal government has provided 10 million euros (\$12.17 million) annually, double the amount provided annually since 2008, to help maintain Jewish cultural heritage. In addition, the federal government provided financial support to the Institute for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, the Rabbi Seminar at the University of Potsdam, and the Leo Baeck Institute. State governments provided additional funds to Jewish organizations in various amounts. On November 12-13, the Minister of Foreign Affairs co-hosted the 10th Anniversary of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism for European government and civil society groups.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Interior Minister de Maizière participated in the German Islam Conference, an ongoing forum for dialogue between federal and state government representatives,

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Muslim organizations, and prominent Muslim individuals. In March the conference addressed social work and pastoral care of the Muslim communities, with a focus on child and youth work and care for the elderly. In May the conference assigned a working group to inventory social services provided by Muslim religious organizations and their communities.

The NRW government held two sessions of its Institutional Forum for Dialogue with Muslim organizations. Founded in 2013 to increase cooperation between the state and Muslim communities, the forum's sessions focused on the diversity of Muslim organizations and on anti-Islamic sentiments. The NRW labor and integration minister chaired the forum, which also included integration experts and representatives from national Muslim organizations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Anti-Semitic speech and actions increased, particularly in the form of statements and slogans at protest demonstrations during the conflict in Gaza. Authorities said neo-Nazi groups were mainly responsible, although there was a rising anti-Semitic trend among Muslim youth. Leading politicians and media representatives spoke out against anti-Semitism, and Muslim groups demonstrated in support of moderate Islam. Catholic and Protestant churches continued to oppose Scientology publicly and the COS said private companies continued to use "sect filters" against its members. There was vandalism against synagogues, mosques, and a Coptic church. Because ethnicity and religion were often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents specifically as being solely based on religious identity.

According to the most recent federal OPC report, there were 1,202 right-wing-extremist manifestations of anti-Semitism (down from 1,286 in 2012) among right-wing politically motivated criminal offenses reported to authorities in 2013). Forty-five of the anti-Semitism cases involved violence (up from 36 in 2012).

On July 7, a Polish resident of Berlin was attacked while he was wearing a cap with a Star of David. He told police he was assaulted because of the cap. He was sitting on a bench with another man when two men began harassing him verbally, and then punched him in the face and kicked him. He suffered lacerations and was later treated at a hospital. The Berlin criminal office stated it suspected the assault was motivated by anti-Semitism.

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The authorities and NGOs continued to attribute most anti-Semitic acts to neo-Nazi or other right-wing groups or individuals, some of whom claimed Jews were the cause of negative modern social and economic trends. NGOs monitoring and working to counter anti-Semitism continued to report a rising anti-Semitic trend among Muslim youth, who were increasingly involved in attacks on and harassment of Jews.

Some politicians and Jewish leaders expressed concern and outrage when the former leader of the right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), Udo Voigt, was elected as a German representative to the European Parliament in May and took a seat on the European Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs Committee. A court had convicted Voigt of promoting Nazism in 2004 after he praised Adolf Hitler, glorified the Waffen SS, and denied the Holocaust. European Parliament President Martin Schulz, a member of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD), told the media: "Everyone who denies the Holocaust and who is against human dignity, democracy, and plurality will encounter the strongest of resistance from me ... There is no place for racists and anti-Semites in this house."

On April 16, a group reportedly supported by the NPD submitted a petition signed by over 10,500 people to the Leipzig city council opposing the planned construction of the first mosque in the city. In advance of August 31 state elections in Saxony, the NPD hung campaign posters with the slogan "Mosque No" throughout Leipzig. On August 18, the NPD projected the same slogan on a wall of the Leipzig city hall and posted a video of it online. In the video, an NPD politician declared the action to be a protest against the "Islamization of Leipzig."

In September small groups of Muslims wearing jackets labeled "Sharia Police" briefly staged patrols in Wuppertal, Aachen, and Bonn to counter alcohol consumption, gambling, smoking, and concerts and to pressure youth to convert to Islam. In response, right-wing extremists wearing shirts labeled "City Protection" staged patrols in Wuppertal. The federal chancellor, interior minister, NRW state interior minister, and other state and federal authorities stated the jackets constituted an infringement of the police's legal and authorized monopoly on the legitimate use of force. They started investigations into the patrols and the individuals who participated.

In November and December a movement known as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) held weekly demonstrations in Dresden

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against alleged “Islamization” of the country, which attracted thousands of peaceful demonstrators as well as thousands of counter-demonstrators from political parties, churches, NGOs, and union groups. Similar but smaller protests and counter-protests were held in other cities, including Bonn and Wuerzburg. In her televised New Year’s Eve speech, Chancellor Merkel pointed out the needs of refugees and the benefits of immigration and discouraged people from joining the PEGIDA protesters, saying they intended to exclude people based on their skin color or religion and their hearts are too often full of prejudice, coldness, and hatred. Other national politicians also condemned the rallies and called for tolerance and understanding of Muslims and foreigners living and working in the country.

Anti-Semitic speech and actions increased. At demonstrations against the conflict in Gaza that took place in several cities in June and July, some protesters shouted anti-Semitic statements and slogans. Police investigated the incidents to determine if they violated bans on anti-Semitic speech and acts and stepped up the permanent security measures around many synagogues during the peak of the protests. On June 12, approximately 2,500 people, including Muslim groups, Islamist extremists, and right-wing extremists, attended an anti-Israel demonstration in Frankfurt. When the demonstrators turned aggressive and chanted anti-Semitic slogans, police offered organizers the use of police loudspeakers to calm the crowd. Organizers instead used the loudspeakers to shout additional anti-Semitic statements. Police investigated the incidents under anti-incitement laws but prosecutors made no indictments.

On July 11, protesters at an anti-Israel demonstration in Bochum shouted, “Israel, child murderer,” and, in Gelsenkirchen, protestors chanted, “Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas.” After the Berlin public prosecutor found that some of the slogans used at protests in Berlin did not meet the legal definition for “incitement of hatred,” administrative authorities banned the use of some of them under the law on freedom of assembly. In July the Central Council of Jews and local Berlin politicians filed a complaint against a Danish imam who called for the death of Jews during prayers at a Berlin mosque; as of December the public prosecutor was continuing to investigate.

In August, following the protests and some Muslim leaders’ reportedly anti-Semitic comments, the Jewish Community of Frankfurt withdrew from the Interfaith Religious Council in Frankfurt, but reopened a dialogue with the council several weeks later.

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Major political party leaders and civil society representatives, including Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic organizations, condemned the anti-Semitic incidents during the summer and called for zero tolerance of anti-Semitism. *Bild*, the largest circulation paper in the country, called on Germans to raise their voices against anti-Semitism with the headline, “Never Again Jew Hatred,” which the paper’s editor said was a repudiation of the anti-Semitism in demonstrations against Israeli actions in Gaza.

In connection with the September 19 Muslim rallies against extremist violence, the Central Council of Muslims published an op-ed piece calling on Muslims not to remain silent when Islam is being “kidnapped by terrorists and criminals,” and the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (organized by the Turkish government) emphasized its existing appeals and initiatives against violence and for peaceful cohabitation.

The Advisory Board of German Foundations on Integration and Migration reported survey findings in April showing a majority of the population was in favor of granting Islam religious equality. A small majority agreed Islam should be taught in schools and two-thirds supported Islamic education at universities. A majority expressed skepticism about granting special treatment to Muslims, such as exemption from sports lessons, for religious reasons. An August poll by Forsa found 52 percent of the population did not think Islam belonged in the country, while 53 percent of interviewees agreed that Islamophobia should be rejected as much as anti-Semitism, with 42 percent saying the two issues could not be compared.

Four of the major political parties (the Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, Social Democratic Party, and Free Democratic Party) continued to exclude Scientologists from party membership.

Catholic and Protestant churches continued to oppose Scientology publicly, although press reporting and public reactions to Scientology decreased. “Sect commissioners,” primarily Protestant and Catholic Church officials, investigated “sects, cults, and psycho groups” and publicized what they considered to be the dangers of these groups. Protestant “sect commissioners” warned the public about the alleged dangers also posed by the Unification Church, Bhagwan-Osho, Transcendental Meditation, and Universal Life. Print and internet literature produced by “sect commissioners” portrayed these groups unfavorably.

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“Sect filters” continued to be used in private sector employment and contracts. The COS alleged a number of companies, including some of the most prominent in the country, placed restrictions on hiring and contracting members of the COS.

In September a non-German bedding company requested that a subcontracted interior designer in Munich sign a “sect filter” as an amendment to its existing contract. As explanation, the company said the regional standards agency required the filter for the company to renew its quality management audit, due every three years.

Many civil society groups continued to seek improved societal respect for religious freedom through tolerance programs, multi-faith groups, and dialogue. Jewish NGOs, such as the Central Council of Jews, provided input and assistance on a variety of government-sponsored tolerance education programs focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

On May 10, Islamic and Christian communities and organizations joined in Krefeld to learn more about other cultures and religions at the first Day of Christian-Islamic Dialogue, held under the patronage of NRW Minister President Hannelore Kraft. The Cologne Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation and the city of Cologne’s National-Socialist Documentation Center collaborated to publish a book aimed at countering anti-Semitism in schools.

In January the Dusseldorf airport established a prayer room for Muslims in its security area for the estimated 63,000 Muslims who transit the airport every year.

The most common anti-Semitic acts involved the desecration of Jewish cemeteries or monuments with graffiti that included swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans.

On July 10, approximately 100 persons attended an anti-Israel demonstration in Essen and attempted to burn the old synagogue, now a Jewish cultural center. Police intervened to stop them. In November prosecutors filed six indictments related to the demonstration for grievous bodily harm, unauthorized public gathering, firearms violations, and incitement. In two cases, they filed charges for attempted grievous bodily harm against police officers. Investigations into additional cases were ongoing.

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In the early morning hours of July 29, attackers in Wuppertal threw Molotov cocktails at the main synagogue, but the devices failed to ignite. Police arrested three Palestinian men as suspects and were conducting investigations for aggravated arson.

On November 3, unidentified perpetrators stole the iron gate to the memorial at the Dachau concentration camp, bearing the Nazi slogan “*Arbeit macht frei*” (“Work Sets You Free”). The investigating police suspected neo-Nazis, based on previous incidents of theft from concentration camp memorials.

On November 9 – the anniversary of Kristallnacht – unknown perpetrators vandalized a synagogue in Pinneberg. The police continued their investigations of the incident as possibly anti-Semitic. A few days after the attack, 400 local citizens participated in a demonstration of solidarity with the Jewish community

Muslim organizations expressed concern about a number of attacks against mosques. In the early hours of September 13, unknown perpetrators threw two Molotov cocktails at the Haci-Bayram Mosque in Oldenburg, causing minor burn damage; police increased patrols in the area.

In October unknown perpetrators started a trash can fire at the Coptic church in Berlin that spread to the church’s front door. The mayor of Berlin condemned the arson, describing it as a crime against peaceful coexistence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy and consulates closely monitored the government’s responses to incidents of religious intolerance, especially manifestations of anti-Semitism in the wake of the conflict in Gaza. Embassy officers expressed the U.S. government’s concern about anti-Semitic acts.

Embassy and consulate officials met frequently with representatives of religious groups to discuss religious freedom issues, and engaged in activities to promote positive attitudes toward minority religious groups, including the Muslim community. In various meetings throughout the year with government officials, members of parliament, and religious groups, embassy representatives encouraged direct dialogue between representatives of the government and law enforcement and representatives of minority religious groups. The embassy and consulates conducted an active program of engagement with the Muslim community that

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included exchanges, outreach efforts, and guest speakers. As part of the outreach program, embassy and consulate officers regularly hosted activities and meetings with members of the Muslim and Jewish communities. They also engaged with interfaith dialogue groups, such as the House of Religions in Lower Saxony, which regularly brought Protestant, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Bahais together.

The embassy and consulates met with members of the Bahai, Alevi, Coptic, and Sufi communities; the Konrad Adenauer Foundation; the Central Council of Muslims; the Central Council of Jews; the COS; and human rights NGOs to discuss religious freedom.

On November 12 and 13, the U.S. permanent representative to the UN led a presidential delegation to an OSCE conference on anti-Semitism co-hosted by the minister of foreign affairs. Following the conference, the U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism met with government officials to discuss collaborating to address anti-Semitism, and with Jewish community leaders to hear their concerns about security, law enforcement, and lack of societal interest in rising anti-Semitism.

Representatives of different faiths traveled to the United States as part of a U.S. government sponsored exchange program to learn about pluralism and the religious composition of the United States. The program participants included 17 young religious leaders of three different faiths who were active in shaping the religious and civic life of their communities.