

MOROCCO 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

According to the constitution, Islam is the religion of the state, and the state guarantees freedom of thought, expression, and assembly. The constitution also says the state guarantees to everyone the freedom to “practice his religious affairs.” The constitution states the king holds the Islamic title “Commander of the Faithful” and that he is the protector of Islam and the guarantor of the freedom to practice religious affairs in the country. It also prohibits political parties founded on religion as well as political parties, parliamentarians, and constitutional amendments that denigrate or infringe on Islam. The law penalizes the use of enticements to convert a Muslim to another religion and prohibits criticism of Islam. In February media reported authorities closed unlicensed mosques in Casablanca, Kenitra, and Inezgane, which were operating in the homes of members of the Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), a Sunni Islamist social movement that rejects the king’s spiritual authority. In March, prior to a visit by Pope Francis, the Committee of Moroccan Christians of the unregistered Moroccan Association for Religious Rights (AMDLR/CMC) released a widely publicized letter to Pope Francis asking him to pressure the government to open investigations into what it described as systemic harassment of Christian citizens by security forces, allegations disputed by a number of local and foreign Christian leaders. Foreign clergy, because of fear of being criminally charged with proselytism, said they discouraged Christian citizens from attending their churches. Although the law allows registration of religious groups as associations, some minority religious groups reported the government rejected their registration requests. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA) continued to guide and monitor the content of sermons in mosques, Islamic religious education, and the dissemination of Islamic religious material by broadcast media, actions it said were intended to combat violent extremism. The government restricted the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials, as well as Islamic materials it deemed inconsistent with the Maliki-Ashari school of Sunni Islam. On March 30, King Mohammed VI welcomed Pope Francis to Rabat. During the pope’s visit, the king announced that he interpreted his title “Commander of the Faithful” as “the Commander of all believers... [including] Moroccan Jews and Christians from other countries, who are living in Morocco.” In April the king launched the construction of a new Jewish cultural museum in a building that was once a school near the historic Jewish neighborhood and cemetery in Fez. On an April 14 television program, Minister of State for Human Rights and Relations of Parliament Mustapha Ramid stated that the government did not criminalize conversion from Islam,

distinguishing it from the crime of “shaking” others’ faiths or attempting to convert Muslims to another religion.

Representatives of minority religious groups said fear of societal harassment, including ostracism by converts’ families, social ridicule, employment discrimination, and potential violence against them by “extremists,” were the main reasons leading them to practice their faiths discreetly. According to the 2018-2019 Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) report, there was continued societal harassment of Shia and Shiism in the press and in Friday sermons. During Ramadan, a teenage girl eating in public was attacked by a bus driver and several young men were arrested and then released but charged a fine for smoking in public.

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the Charge d’Affaires, and other U.S. government officials promoted religious freedom and tolerance in visits with key government officials. In these meetings, U.S. government officials recognized the Moroccan government’s efforts to promote interfaith dialogue while encouraging the government to recognize the existence of all of its religious minority communities as well as establish a legal framework for non-Muslim/non-Jewish citizens to address personal legal status matters, including marriage. U.S. government officials also met with members of religious minority and majority communities, where they highlighted on a regular basis the importance of protection of religious minorities and interfaith dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 34.6 million (midyear 2019 estimate). More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, and less than 0.1 percent of the population is Shia Muslim, according to U.S. government estimates. Groups together constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Christians, Jews, and Baha’is.

According to Jewish community leaders, there are an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 Jews, approximately 2,500 of whom reside in Casablanca. Some citizen Christian community leaders estimate there are between 2,000 and 6,000 Christian citizens distributed throughout the country; however, the Moroccan Association of Human Rights estimates there are 25,000 Christian citizens. One media source reported that while most Christians in the country are foreigners, there are an estimated 8,000 Christian citizens and that “several thousand” citizens have converted, mostly to Protestant churches.

Foreign-resident Christian leaders estimate the foreign-resident Christian population numbers at least 30,000 Roman Catholics and an estimated 10,000 Protestants, many of whom are recent migrants from sub-Saharan Africa or lifelong residents of the country whose families have resided and worked in the country for generations but do not hold citizenship. There are small foreign-resident Anglican communities in Casablanca and Tangier. There are an estimated 3000 foreign-residents who identify as Russian and Greek Orthodox, including a small foreign-resident Russian Orthodox community in Rabat and a small foreign-resident Greek Orthodox community in Casablanca. Most foreign-resident Christians live in the Casablanca, Tangier, and Rabat urban areas, but small numbers of foreign Christians are present throughout the country, including many who are migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Shia Muslim leaders estimate there are several thousand Shia citizens, with the largest proportion in the north. In addition, there are an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 foreign-resident Shia from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Leaders of the Ahmadi Muslim community estimate their numbers at 600. Leaders of the Baha'i community estimate there are 350-400 members throughout the country.

BBC Arabic reports that 15 percent of the population identifies as nonreligious, up from under 5 percent in 2013.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

According to the constitution, the country is a Muslim state, and Islam is the religion of the state. The constitution guarantees freedom of thought, expression, and assembly, and says the state guarantees every individual the freedom to practice his or her religious affairs. The constitution states the king holds the title "Commander of the Faithful," and he is the protector of Islam and the guarantor of the freedom to practice religious affairs in the country. The constitution prohibits the enactment of laws or constitutional amendments infringing upon its provisions relating to Islam, and also recognizes the Jewish community as an integral component of society. According to the constitution, political parties may not be founded on religion and may not denigrate or infringe on Islam. Religions other than Islam and Judaism are not recognized by the constitution or laws.

The constitution and the law governing media prohibit any individual, including members of parliament normally immune from arrest, from criticizing Islam on public platforms, such as print or online media, or in public speeches. Such expressions are punishable by imprisonment for two years and a fine of 200,000 dirhams (\$20,800).

The law penalizes anyone who “employs enticements to undermine the faith” or convert a Muslim to another faith by exploiting his weakness or need for assistance, or through the use of educational, health, or other institutions and provides punishments of six months to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams (\$21-\$52). The same penalties apply to anyone who intentionally interferes with religious rites or celebrations where this causes disturbances or affects the dignity of such religious acts. It also provides the right to a court trial for anyone accused of such an offense. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the law. The law permits the government to expel summarily any noncitizen resident it determines to be “a threat to public order,” and the government has used this clause to expel foreigners suspected of proselytizing.

By law, impeding or preventing one or more persons from worshipping or from attending worship services of any religion is punishable by six months to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams (\$21-\$52). The penal code states any person known to be Muslim who breaks the fast in public during the month of Ramadan without an exception granted by religious authorities is liable to punishment of six months in prison and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams (\$21-\$52). Owners have discretion to keep their restaurants open during Ramadan.

The High Authority for Audiovisual Communications established by the constitution requires all eight public television stations to dedicate 5 percent of their airtime to Islamic religious content and to broadcast the Islamic call to prayer five times daily.

Sunni Muslims and Jews are the only religious groups recognized in the constitution as native to the country. A separate set of laws and special courts govern personal status matters for Jews, including functions such as marriage, inheritance, and other personal status matters. Rabbinical authorities, who are also court officials, administer Jewish family courts. Muslim judges trained in the country’s Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of sharia administer the courts for personal status matters for all other religious groups. According to the law, a Muslim man may marry a Christian or Jewish woman; a Muslim woman may not marry a man of another religion unless he converts to Islam. Non-Muslims must

formally convert to Islam and be permanent residents before they can become guardians of abandoned or orphaned children. Guardianship entails the caretaking of a child, which may last until the child reaches 18, but it does not allow changing the child's name or inheritance rights, and requires maintaining the child's birth religion, according to orphanage directors.

Legal provisions outlined in the general tax code provide tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of recognized religious groups (Sunni Muslims and Jews) and religious groups registered as associations (some "foreign" Christian churches). The law does not require religious groups to register to worship privately, but a nonrecognized religious group must register as an association to conduct business on behalf of the group (e.g., open and hold bank accounts, rent property, acquire land and building grants, and have access to customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities) or to hold public gatherings. Associations must register with local Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials in the jurisdiction of the association's headquarters. An individual representative of a religious group neither recognized nor registered as an association may be held liable for any of the group's public gatherings, transactions, bank accounts, property rentals, and/or petitions to the government. The registration application must contain the name and purpose of the association; the name, nationality, age, profession, and residential address of each founder; and the address of the association's headquarters. The constitution guarantees civil society associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) the right to organize themselves and exercise their activities freely within the scope of the constitution. The law on associations prohibits organizations that pursue activities the government regards as "illegal, contrary to good morals, or aimed at undermining the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, or the monarchical regime, or which call for discrimination."

Many foreign-resident Christian churches (churches run by and attended by foreign residents only) are registered as associations. The Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican Churches maintain different forms of official status. The Russian Orthodox and Anglican Churches are registered as branches of international associations through the embassies of Russia and the United Kingdom, respectively. The Protestant and Catholic Churches, whose existence as foreign-resident churches predates the country's independence in 1956, as well as the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches, maintain a special status recognized by the government, which allows them to preserve houses of worship and assign foreign clergy.

By law, all publicly funded educational institutions must teach Sunni Islam in accordance with the teachings and traditions of the Maliki-Ashari school of Islamic jurisprudence. Foreign-run and privately funded schools have the choice of including or omitting religious instruction within the school's curriculum. Private Jewish schools may teach Judaism.

According to the constitution, only the High Council of Ulema, a group headed and appointed by the king with representatives from all regions of the country, is authorized to issue fatwas, which become legally binding only through the king's endorsement in a royal decree and subsequent confirmation by parliamentary legislation. Such fatwas are considered binding only on Maliki Achari Sunni Muslims. If the king or parliament declines to ratify a decision of the council, the decision remains nonbinding and unenforced.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Authorities still denied Christian citizen groups freedom of worship in churches, the right to Christian or civil marriage, and funeral services. The government does not allow Christian citizens to establish churches.

The JCO, a Sunni Islamist social movement that rejects the king's spiritual authority, remained banned but continued to operate. It remained the largest social movement in the country despite being unregistered. The JCO continued to release press statements, hold conferences, manage internet sites, and participate in political demonstrations. According to media, there were instances in which the government prevented the organization from meeting and restricted public distribution of JCO's published materials. On February 6, media reported authorities closed unlicensed mosques operating in the homes of JCO members in Casablanca, Kenitra, and Inezgane. According to Agence France Presse, local authorities in Casablanca stated the homes served as "places of prayer and gatherings" and were home to illegal activities.

In March the AMDLR/CMC released a widely publicized letter to Pope Francis asking him to pressure the government to open investigations into what it said was systemic harassment of Christian citizens by security forces. A number of local and foreign Christian leaders disputed the AMDLR/CMC claims that there was systemic harassment by security forces of Christian citizens. AMDLR leader

Jawad El-Hamidy said that while “foreign Christians” were free to exercise their religious freedom, Moroccan converts were not and must worship in private. According to a February press report, El-Hamidy said, “There is lack of recognition of freedom of belief and an absence of legal guarantees when it comes to practicing some non-Islamic religious rituals: Morocco does not tolerate people converting to Christianity from Islam,” adding, “Christians do not possess ‘normal’ citizenship rights, and there is no political willingness to protect them.” Local citizen Christian leaders reported being closely monitored by state authorities during the pope’s visit from March 30 through 31.

Some foreign-born clergy and other community members tried to dissuade citizens from attending public worship services, for the citizens’ safety and that of the church and its members.

During the year, there were no reports of authorities prohibiting nonregistered religious groups from practicing their religion in private.

According to community leaders, Christian citizens said authorities continued to make phone or house calls to demonstrate they monitored Christian activities.

A number of religious groups reported they cooperated with authorities and occasionally informed them of planned large gatherings, for which authorities sometimes provided security.

According to religious leaders and legal scholars, the government’s refusal to allow Shia Muslim groups to register as associations continued to prevent these groups from gathering legally for public religious observations. There were no known Shia mosques. Shia representatives reported they did not attempt to register during the year because they feared security forces would harass them as had been the case in previous years.

AMDLR reapplied for registration as an association during the year. Authorities refused to accept the application, according to the head of AMDLR. A Christian group that applied to register as an association in 2018 was still awaiting a response from the MOI at year’s end.

The U.S. NGO Open Doors stated in its annual 2019 World Watch List that the penal code, which criminalizes “shaking the faith” of a Muslim, put many Christians who talked to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. The NGO also stated that while the penal code provision “only punish[ed]

proselytization, converts to Christianity [could] be punished in other ways, such as loss of inheritance rights and custody of their children.”

Church officials reported Christian citizens rarely attended officially recognized churches, and they discouraged them from doing so to avoid official accusations of proselytizing, which could lead to their inability to continue leading the church and its ability to provide services, and to avoid putting other priorities, such as building projects, at risk.

On August 27, authorities in the Al Houz region outside Marrakesh demolished a partially constructed installation described by its builder, German artist Olivier Bienkowski and his NGO PixelHelper, as a “memorial dedicated to the murdered Jews in Europe and standing against the persecution of minorities such as the Sinti and Romani (Eastern Europe), Muslim Uigurs (China), and gays,” after PixelHelper failed to obtain proper building permits. In media interviews, Bienkowski said he hoped to construct the first Holocaust Memorial in northern Africa for educational purposes and to memorialize forced labor camps in the nearby desert during World War II where Jews and others were confined. The government ordered Bienkowski to leave the country in August. Local authorities disputed Bienkowski’s version of events, stating the country had a “proud history” of diversity and peaceful coexistence of its various religious communities and emphasizing the lack of coordination with appropriate government offices and proper permits. According to a media report, a leader of the local Jewish community said that Bienkowski intended to harm the country by conveying a false image of it as anti-Semitic. He also said that the Jewish community in the Al Houz region welcomed the decision of the authorities to demolish the project.

The 2017 ban on the import, production, and sale of the burqa remained in effect. The MOI cited security concerns as justification for the ban. The ban did not prevent individuals from wearing burqas or making them at home for individual use. Authorities continued to prohibit anchors on national television and police and army personnel in uniform from wearing a hijab or burqa.

The MEIA remained the principal government institution responsible for shaping the country’s religious life and promoting its interpretation of Sunni Islam. It employed 2100 *morchidines* (male Muslim spiritual guides) and 901 *morchidates* (female Muslim spiritual guides) in mosques or religious institutions throughout the country. The *morchidates* taught religious subjects and provided counsel on a variety of matters, including women’s legal rights and family planning. It continued to provide government-required one-year training to imams, training an

average of 150 *morchidines* and 100 *morchidates* a year. It also continued to train foreign imams, predominantly from sub-Saharan Africa. The training sessions fulfilled the requirement for religious leaders to acquire a certificate issued by the High Council of Ulema to operate in the country. The High Council of Ulema also continued to host continuing training sessions and capacity-building exercises for the religious leaders.

The government required religious leaders who work in the country to abide by the guidelines outlined in the MEIA-issued *Guide of the Imam, Khatib, and the Preacher*. The MEIA continued to guide and monitor the content of sermons in mosques, Islamic religious education, and the dissemination of Islamic religious material by broadcast media, actions it said were intended to combat violent extremism. In January the MEIA suspended an imam for saying that celebrating the January 1 New Year was “haram” (against religion) during a sermon in a mosque in Rabat.

The MEIA continued to monitor Quranic schools to prevent what the ministry considered inflammatory or extremist rhetoric and to ensure teaching followed approved doctrine.

The government required mosques to close to the public shortly after daily prayer times to prevent use of the premises for what it termed “unauthorized activity,” including gatherings intended to promote extremism. Construction of new mosques, including those constructed using private funds, required authorization from the MEIA.

The government continued to restrict the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials, as well as some Islamic materials it deemed inconsistent with the Maliki-Ashari school of Sunni Islam.

Some Amazigh (Berber)-rights activists reported intolerance and suppression of traditional Amazigh customs in rural Amazigh villages by government-appointed *morchidates*.

The government’s policy remained to ban the sale of all books, videotapes, and DVDs it considered extremist.

The government permitted the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible were available for sale in a few bookshops for use in higher education courses.

The government continued drafting and implementing an educational charter mandating traditional education be based on “values” and the “respect for religious and legal studies.” The Ministry of Education (MOE) continued a review of the religion curriculum used in primary and secondary education to make reforms based on universal values of liberty, empathy, solidarity, and honesty. Since the review began in 2016, 29 textbooks have been rewritten and modifications to textbooks continued during the year. The government was sharing its experience with other countries.

There were no reports from Shia citizens that security forces detained and questioned Shia citizens about their beliefs. In contrast to previous years, the MOE reported it granted the only two exemptions from mandatory Islamic education requested during the year.

The government continued to allow the operation of registered foreign-resident Christian churches. In contrast to previous years, Christian leaders said there were no reports of authorities pressuring converts to renounce their faith by informing friends, relatives, and employers of the individual’s conversions. Foreign residents and visitors attended religious services without restriction at places of worship belonging to officially recognized churches. An estimated 10,000 individuals, including sub-Saharan African Christians as well as some who identified as Sunni Muslims, attended the Sunday Mass Pope Francis led in Rabat on March 30.

Jewish and Christian citizens continued to state elementary and high school curricula did not include mention of the historical legacy and current presence of their groups in the country. The government continued to fund the study of Jewish culture and heritage at state-run universities.

The government continued to disseminate information about Islam and Judaism over dedicated state-funded television and radio channels. Television channel Assadissa (Six) programming was strictly religious, consisting primarily of Quran and *hadith* (authoritative sayings and deeds ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad) readings and exegesis, highlighting the government’s interpretation of Islam.

According to observers, the government tolerated social and charitable activities consistent with Sunni Islam. For example, the Unity and Reform Movement, the country’s largest registered Islamic social organization, continued its close relationship with the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), the largest party in

the governing coalition, and continued to operate without restriction, according to media reports.

The monarchy continued to support the restoration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries throughout the country, efforts it stated were necessary to preserve the country's religious and cultural heritage and to serve as a symbol of tolerance. According to the government and Jewish leaders, the MEIA did not interfere in the operations or the practices in synagogues. In April the king launched the construction of a new Jewish cultural museum in a building that was once a school near the historic Jewish neighborhood and cemetery in Fez.

The Prison Administration authorized religious observances and services provided by religious leaders for all prisoners, including religious minorities.

During the annual commemoration of the anniversary of the king's reign, the king bestowed honors on the Grand Rabbi of Casablanca and the heads of the Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and Russian Orthodox churches in recognition of their contributions to religious tolerance in the country.

On March 30, King Mohammed VI received Pope Francis at Tour Hassan, the burial site of his father and grandfather, Kings Hassan II and Mohamed V. The by-invitation ceremony included foreign and domestic religious leaders, the diplomatic corps, sub-Saharan migrants, security forces, and local government officials. The king's nationally televised remarks promoted interfaith dialogue and interreligious coexistence. Alternating between Arabic, French, Spanish, and English during his speech, the king said he interpreted his title "Commander of the Faithful" as "the Commander of all believers... [including] Moroccan Jews and Christians from other countries, who are living in Morocco."

On March 30, the king and Pope Francis also visited the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, which trains domestic, European, and African imams and *morchidines and morchidates* on a moderate interpretation of Sunni Islam as a counter to the spread of radical Islam, an institute the pope praised for "provid[ing] a suitable preparation for future religious leaders." The institute trains up to 1,400 students to serve as imams, including foreign students.

After the pope and king visited the Imam Training Center in Rabat on March 30, their hosts staged a musical performance fusing the Islamic call to prayer with Jewish and Christian hymns. The International Union of Muslim Scholars, a Salafist organization, denounced the performance as offensive to Islam's values.

Many citizens turned to social media to denounce the criticism and defend the musical performance as an example of interreligious coexistence.

On October 3-4, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA) in partnership with the Rabita Mohammedia of Religious Scholars, an association of religious scholars promoting openness and tolerance in Islam and founded by the king in 2006, hosted the “First Regional Conference on Cultural Heritage Protection for Religious Communities.” Government officials, religious leaders, and cultural preservation experts from Morocco and other countries participated in the two-day conference that covered policies that promote respect for and protection of cultural heritage and efforts to restore cultural heritage sites of religious significance for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The conference also aimed to raise public awareness, particularly among youth, of the importance of cultural heritage related to religious communities. At the conference, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mounia Boucetta said, “Moroccans have made an irreversible choice to uphold and practice the values of tolerance, coexistence, and peace, a choice that honors the legacy of our past but most importantly it is the only choice we have to ensure a stable and prosperous future for our country.”

On an April 14 television program, Minister of Human Rights Mustapha Ramid stated the government did not criminalize conversion from Islam, distinguishing it from the crime of “shaking” others’ faiths or attempting to convert Muslims to another religion. Stating that the convert was not “culpable,” Ramid said the criminal code focused on proselytizing that exploits the “fragility” and “needs” of potential converts.

Member of Parliament Amina Maelainine, a PJD member, said in March that “the veil is not an Islamic pillar” and that she had previously put “disproportionate” emphasis on physical appearance and modesty as central to Islam. She also stated that some members of her party were “open on the question of the hijab” but could not openly express their views because of “party and social constraints.” Faith, she said, was entirely a personal matter, and “freedom of conscience should be guaranteed for everyone.” Maelainine’s comments followed release of photographs on social media showing her unveiled during a visit to Paris.

MOI and MEIA authorization continued to be a requirement for the renovation or construction of churches. On June 21, the St. John’s Anglican Church in Casablanca, which is home to an expatriate Anglican community, hosted the grand opening of its community center, built with approval from government authorities;

the church building was under government-approved renovation, with an expected grand opening in 2020.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Representatives of minority religious groups said fear of societal harassment, including ostracism by converts' families, social ridicule, employment discrimination, and potential violence against them by "extremists," were the main reasons leading them to practice their faiths discreetly.

During Ramadan, the press reported a teenage girl in Ouazzane was attacked on a bus by the bus driver for eating in public. Media reported she filed a complaint with the local authorities who opened an investigation into the case. In August the government reported the prosecutor general's office closed the case after the victim and perpetrator of the attack came to a mediated resolution. During Ramadan, authorities arrested and fined several individuals for smoking in public.

According to the 2018-2019 AMDH report, there was continued societal harassment of Shia and Shiism in the press and through Friday sermons. Shia reported they observed Ashura in private to avoid societal harassment. Shia Muslims said that many avoided disclosing their religious affiliation in areas where their numbers were smaller.

In March the New York Times reported the country's citizens could not freely express atheistic beliefs or conversion to another faith, adding that "Criticizing Islam remains extremely sensitive, and worship for indigenous Christians ... is problematic, particularly for those who converted from Islam."

There were reports from media, activists, community leaders, and Christian converts that Christian citizens faced social pressure to convert to Islam or renounce their Christian faith from non-Christian family and friends. Young Christians who still lived with their Muslim families reportedly did not reveal their faith because they believed they might be expelled from their homes unless they renounced Christianity.

Jewish citizens continued to state that they lived and attended services at synagogues in safety. They said they were able to visit religious sites regularly and to hold annual commemorations. Several Jewish citizens, however, reported increased perceived societal intolerance, particularly when news media gave prominent coverage to Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Media continued to report women had difficulty finding employment in some private businesses if they wore a hijab or other head covering. When women who wore a hijab obtained such employment, they reported employers either encouraged or required them to remove their headscarves during working hours. Conversely, some women cited on media outlets societal pressure to wear the hijab given the widespread societal emphasis on physical appearance and modesty as central to Islam. According to a media report, during an October 12 roundtable at the 12th annual Fez Festival of Sufi Culture, an audience member called for a woman wearing a hijab to remove her head covering before posing a question to the roundtable's panel of experts. The woman wearing the hijab defended her right to do so and noted the forum was an Islamic festival.

In contrast to previous years, Baha'i leaders said they did not experience harassment during the year. Members of the Baha'i Faith said they were open about their faith with family, friends, and neighbors.

Muslim citizens continued to study at private Christian and Jewish schools, reportedly because these schools maintained a reputation for offering a good education. According to school administrators, Muslim students continued to constitute a significant portion of the students at Jewish schools in Casablanca.

Abdelilah Benkirane, former prime minister and former secretary general of the PJD, told the press in May that the role of political parties is to find solutions faced by their country, independent from religion. Benkirane, who described the PJD as a political party with an Islamic orientation, said religion and politics can be separate, "The state's body of laws should not necessarily be in line with Islamic rulings."

A report published on June 27 by the Arab Barometer, an international research and polling network, found 38 percent of citizens said they were religious compared to 44 percent who were somewhat religious and 13 percent who identified themselves as not religious. Those aged 18-29 were more than 40 percent less likely to identify as religious compared to those aged 60 or older. The report also found "the younger generation is substantially less likely to want religious figures to have a say over government." The report added, "Among...Muslims, roughly a quarter (27 percent) believe that the law should be entirely (12 percent) or mostly (15 percent) based on the sharia. Instead, a plurality (32 percent) say the law should be based equally on the sharia and the will of the people, while 21 percent say it should be based mostly on the will of the

people, and 15 percent say it should be entirely based on what the people prefer. Support for making laws mostly or entirely based on the sharia has declined since 2016, falling by 9 points.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires, other embassy and consulate general officials, and visiting U.S. government officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, met with government officials, including from the MFA, MOI, and Ministry of Justice, to promote religious freedom and tolerance, as well as the rights of minority communities. For example, on January 8, the Charge d’Affaires met with Minister of State for Human Rights and Relations with Parliament Mustapha Ramid and the Inter-Ministerial Delegate for Human Rights Ahmed Benayoub to underscore the importance of preserving and protecting the rights of all religious communities. In October the Ambassador at Large and Charge d’Affaires recognized the government’s efforts to promote interfaith dialogue while also encouraging the government to recognize the existence of all of its religious minority communities as well as to establish a legal framework for non-Muslim or Jewish citizens to address personal legal status matters, including marriage.

Embassy and consulate general officials met members of religious minority and majority communities throughout the country, where they highlighted on a regular basis the importance of protection of religious minorities and interfaith dialogue.

In May the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM) organized an academic seminar on the relationship between the country’s Muslim and Jewish communities and the country’s tradition of tolerance and coexistence at the U.S. Legation, a U.S. government-owned building (and the only National Historic Landmark located outside of U.S. territory) leased to TALIM, which receives regular embassy funding for cultural and outreach programming. Embassy officials attended the seminar and publicized it on embassy communications platforms.

In June an embassy official delivered remarks recognizing religious freedom as an inalienable right that should be preserved and advanced for all at the opening ceremony for the Anglican Church Community Center in Casablanca. On October 3, the Ambassador at Large delivered remarks at the opening of the First Regional Conference on Cultural Heritage Protection for Religious Communities, cohosted and coordinated by the MFA, Rabita, and the U.S. government. In his remarks, the

Ambassador highlighted the U.S. commitment to cultural preservation and religious freedom and recognized the country as a regional leader in preserving its Jewish sites around the country.