

## SWITZERLAND

### Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Such incidents were mostly directed against Muslim and Jewish minorities.

The U.S. ambassador raised issues concerning religious freedom in meetings with government officials. U.S. embassy political officers engaged nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society officials in discussions on religious freedom and exchanged views with religious law experts from the divinity faculties of the Universities of Bern and Lucerne.

### Section I. Religious Demography

Three-quarters of the population nominally belong to either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant churches, and although actual church attendance rates are much lower, 80 percent say they are religious and 22 percent acknowledged being “very religious,” according to a 2007 Religion Monitor survey sponsored by the Bertelsmann Foundation.

The 2000 census noted membership in religious denominations as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 35.3 percent Protestant; 4.3 percent Muslim; 1.8 percent Christian Orthodox; and 11.1 percent professing no formal creed. Religious groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include Old Catholics, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews.

The majority of Muslims originate from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania, followed by Turkey and North Africa. The majority are Sunni Muslims; there are also Shia and Alawites. Most of the Muslim population settled in larger cities or in close proximity to cities and to a lesser degree in mountain cantons or rural areas. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of Muslims are practicing believers.

Over 75 percent of Jewish households are located in urban areas such as Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern.

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

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the federal penal code prohibits any form of debasement of or discrimination against any religion or religious adherents.

The law penalizes public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination, spreading racist ideology, and denying crimes against humanity. In the past there have been convictions under this legislation for anti-Semitism and historical revisionism, including Holocaust denial.

The government Federal Service for Combating Racism continued to support antiracism activities with funding from the regular federal budget. During the year, the Federal Service for Combating Racism made 900,000 Swiss francs (\$970,760) available and funded 61 projects. Projects included the creation of a history lesson sequence for schools on anti-Semitism during the 20th century, art shows, and academic research. It also financed special sensitization workshops for the military police.

The country is engaged in a total revision of its integration program, a process the Federal Office of Migration started in 2010. During the year, the federal government held consultations with the cantons on policy formulation. On November 23, the Federal Council released the first draft of an Integration Guideline in which responsibilities of each canton are outlined to provide improved assistance to religious minorities and better protection against racism and discrimination based on religious belief.

There is no official state church; cantons handle religious matters according to the constitution. Most of the 26 cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separate) financially support at least one of the three traditional religious communities--Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant--with funds collected through a church tax. Each canton observes its own regulations regarding the relationship between church and state. In some cantons

the church tax is voluntary, while in others an individual who chooses not to contribute to the church tax may have to leave the church formally. In some cantons private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons also allow the church tax to be collected on behalf of the Jewish community. Islamic and other nontraditional religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

Religious organizations may register with the government to receive tax-exempt status.

Although groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize, the government has implemented new regulations that restrict this right. Foreign missionaries must obtain a “religious worker” visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof that the foreigner does not displace a citizen from doing the job and has formally completed theological training, and that the host organization will financially support the visa holder. To obtain a work permit the applicant must have sufficient knowledge of, respect for, and understanding of Swiss customs and culture; understand at least one of the three main national languages; and hold a degree in theology. The host organization must also acknowledge the country’s legal order and pledge that it will not tolerate abuse by members. If an applicant is unable to meet these requirements, the government may deny the residency and work permit. According to the courts, missionaries of certain denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not meet these provisions, primarily the requirement of a theology degree. The government has imposed quotas limiting the entry of religious workers of these denominations for 2010 and 2011 and informed church officials that it will not admit any religious workers belonging to these denominations effective 2012. The government may further refuse residency and work permits if a background check reveals that the individual has ties to questionable (radicalized) religious groups/institutions or has formerly engaged in hate preaching. Immigration authorities may refuse residency permits to imams considered “fundamentalists” by the government. The Federal Law on Foreigners requires mandatory training for immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration into society. Among other provisions, the training program aims to ensure that immigrant clerics can speak at least one of the three main national languages.

Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but municipal school authorities have some discretion in its implementation. Most public cantonal schools offer religious education, with the exception of schools in Geneva and Neuchatel. Public schools normally offer classes in Catholic and Protestant doctrines; a few

schools provide instruction on other religious groups in the country. Two municipalities offer religious classes in Islamic doctrine in the canton of Lucerne. In some cantons religious classes are voluntary, while in others they form part of the mandatory curriculum; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Those of different religious groups are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by religious groups, or they may homeschool their children.

A number of cantons have reformed religious education in public schools to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrines with nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture. There are no national guidelines for waivers on religious grounds from classes other than confessional instruction, and practices vary. A new federal law affirms that no child can be excluded from swimming lessons for religious reasons. According to the law, swimming lessons are part of the curriculum and therefore mandatory for every pupil. The only grounds for exemption are health issues.

The construction of minarets is banned. This ban has no effect on the four existing minarets or on the building of or worshipping in mosques. Following a November visit to the country, an OSCE assessment team concluded that discrimination against Muslims was increasing. The team noted that refugees from Albania and Bosnia were largely targeted, and the most evident cases of religious discrimination occurred during naturalization proceedings and in the workplace. The OSCE recommended the establishment of an umbrella organization for Muslims to represent their interests.

The Federal Act on Animal Protection prevents local ritual slaughter for kosher and halal meat; however, importation of such meat remains legal and available.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day. Sunday is a public holiday; shops remain closed, and Sunday work is generally not allowed unless a special permit is given, usually reserved for hospitals, service industries, and essential occupations.

## **Government Practices**

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom; however, there were reports of discrimination against minority groups, mostly against Muslims, at the local level.

Resident Islamic organizations complained of discrimination by cantonal and municipal authorities who refused to approve zoning applications to build mosques or establish Muslim cemeteries. There were reported cases of this occurring in Zurich, Lucerne, and St. Gallen during the year.

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

In response to the increasing number of practicing Muslim soldiers, the army created guidelines affording special conditions for meals and prayers for its Muslim personnel.

In November 2010 the municipal authorities of Winterthur invested 1.5 million Swiss francs (\$1.62 million) for the construction of a Muslim cemetery. Construction was completed mid-year. Winterthur is the eighth city to construct a Muslim cemetery. The other cities include Geneva, Basel-Liestal, Zurich, Bern, Thun, Lugano, and Lucerne.

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

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Such incidents were mostly directed against Muslim and Jewish minorities.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, there were 63 reported incidents against foreigners or minorities during the year. These figures included instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

The Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against Anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) reported 242 cases of anti-Semitism during the year. There were 130 anti-Semitic incidents reported in the western French- and Italian-speaking part of the country. One hundred and twelve cases occurred in the German-speaking area of the country--including five incidents the CICAD considered "grave offenses." According to the CICAD, the number of incidents rose 28 percent from 2010. One of the worst incidents occurred in March when unidentified individuals fired steel ball bearings at a Jewish school in Zurich. The

school was empty at the time of the attack, and there were no injuries. The building was slightly damaged.

Many NGOs coordinated interfaith events to promote tolerance throughout the country. On November 1 an art exhibition in Bern showcased paintings by Muslims on the subject "Your Happiest and Saddest Moments in Life." The show, which ran through December 3, was intended to disabuse negative societal stereotypes by visualizing that Muslims experience the same worries and moments of joy as non-Muslims.

On November 14, unidentified individuals placed several pig carcasses and blood on a lot of land in the city of Grenchen where a mosque is to be built. According to a letter found at the building site, the perpetrators were attempting to "discredit" the land to prevent the mosque's construction.

On November 9, Jewish leaders organized an annual awareness-raising trip to Auschwitz for teachers and students that had a positive multiplier effect in classrooms.

In July an anti-immigration group, Geneve Non Conforme, unveiled a new poster advertising a national "Save Switzerland" day depicting a doll wrapped in an Israeli flag wearing a yarmulke and lying on its back with an arrow through its head. The Simon Weisenthal Center and CICAD denounced the incident and called on the Swiss government to issue a statement condemning the poster.

On February 23, three young men attacked physically and verbally assaulted the local rabbi's assistant in Lausanne. Police arrested two of the attackers. The third person was not arrested as he did not physically participate in the attack. All three were minors. Police charged the two individuals according to the juvenile penal code; however, no information on the charges or sentences was available.

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

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints complained about the significant reduction in the number of religious visas issued by Swiss authorities. Embassy officials raised the church's concerns with officials from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.