

SAUDI ARABIA

Executive Summary

The laws and policies restrict religious freedom, and, in practice, the government generally enforced these restrictions. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for or protection of the right to religious freedom. Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and is severely restricted in practice. According to the 1992 Basic Law, Sunni Islam is the official religion and the country's constitution is the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The legal system is based on the government's application of the Hanbali School of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. The public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and there is no separation between state and religion. The government generally permitted Shia religious gatherings and non-Muslim private religious practices. Some Muslims who did not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship and community centers. The government executed individuals sentenced on charges of "witchcraft and sorcery" during the year. The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) and security forces of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) conducted some raids on private non-Muslim religious gatherings and sometimes confiscated the personal religious materials of non-Muslims. There were fewer reported charges of harassment and abuse for religious reasons at the hands of the CPVPV compared with the previous year, although online criticism of the organization increased. Efforts to revise school textbooks were ongoing at year's end. The government reported completing revisions in half the grades, but Arabic and religion textbooks continued to contain overtly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians as well as intolerant references by allusion against Shia and Sufi Muslims and other religious groups.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious vigilantes sometimes harassed and assaulted citizens and foreigners.

Senior U.S. government officials raised religious freedom issues at the highest levels within the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance

(MOIA), MOI, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Human Rights Commission (HRC), Ministry of Education (MOE), and Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI) during the year. U.S. government officials also continued to meet with minority religious groups to discuss religious freedom concerns, including Shia groups and non-Muslim expatriates. On August 18, the secretary of state redesignated Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In connection with this redesignation, the secretary issued a waiver of sanctions on the same date “to further the purposes of the act.”

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 85 to 90 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims, who predominantly adhere to the Hanbali School of Islamic jurisprudence. Shiites constitute 10 to 15 percent of the population. Approximately 80 percent of Shia are “Twelvers” (followers of Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi, whom they recognize as the Twelfth Imam) and are primarily located in the Eastern Province. Twelver Shia adhere to the Jafari school of jurisprudence. Most of the remaining Shiite population are Sulaimaniya Ismailis, also known as “Seveners” (those who branched off from the Twelvers to follow Isma’il ibn Jafar as the Seventh Imam). Seveners reside primarily in Najran Province. In the western Hejaz region, there are approximately 150,000 Nakhawala, or “Medina Shia.” Additionally, statistics put the number of Zaydis (followers of Zayd ibn Ali, whom they recognize as the Fifth Imam) at approximately 500,000. The Zaydis reside primarily in the cities of Jizan and Najran along the border with Yemen.

Foreign embassies indicated that the foreign population in the country, including many undocumented migrants, may exceed 12 million. Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available, but they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians (including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and Roman Catholics), Jews, more than 250,000 Hindus, more than 70,000 Buddhists, approximately 45,000 Sikhs, and others.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The laws and policies restrict religious freedom.

According to the Basic Law, Islam is the official religion, and the country's constitution is the Qur'an and the Sunna. There is no legal recognition or protection of religious freedom, but the government generally allows private practice of non-Muslim religions.

The Basic Law establishes the country as a sovereign Arab Islamic state. Neither the government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of state and religion.

The government considers its legitimacy to rest in part on its custodianship of the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina and its promotion of Islam. The official interpretation of Islam is derived from the writings and teachings of 18th-century Sunni religious scholar Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, who advocated a return to what he considered to be the practices of the first three generations of the Muslim era and urged Muslims to be stricter in their obedience to Islam. The country's religious teaching opposes attempts by the Muslim reform movements of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries to reinterpret aspects of Islamic law in light of economic and social developments, particularly in areas such as gender relations, personal autonomy, family law, and participatory democracy. Outside the country this variant of Islamic practice is often referred to as "Wahhabi," a term the Saudis do not use.

The Islamic judicial system is based on laws derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna and on legal opinions and fatwas (rulings) of the Council of Senior [Religious] Scholars. Established in 1971, the council is an advisory body of 20 persons that reports to the king. The basic law recognizes the council, supported by the board of research and religious rulings, as the supreme authority on religious rulings. It is headed by the grand mufti and is composed of Sunni religious scholars and jurists, as well as the minister of justice. Government universities provide training on all the Sunni schools of jurisprudence but focus on the Hanbali school; consequently, most Islamic law judges follow its system of interpretation. Three members of the council belong to non-Hanbali schools, representing the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi'i schools; however, there are no Shiite members. Scholars are chosen at the king's discretion and serve renewable four-year terms, with most members serving for life. Islamic law is not based on precedent and rulings can diverge widely. In theory, rulings can be appealed to the appellate and supreme courts, but these higher courts must agree to hear the case.

The government permits Shia judges presiding over courts in the Eastern Province to use the Jafari school of Islamic jurisprudence to adjudicate cases in family law,

inheritance, and endowment management. There were six Shia judges, all located in the Eastern Province cities of Qatif and al-Ahsa, where the majority of Shia live. Shia living in other parts of the Eastern Province, Najran Province, and the western Hejaz region have no access to local, regional, or national Shiite courts. Shia courts' powers are limited by the fact that any litigant who disagrees with a ruling can seek a new decision from a Sunni court. Sunni court rulings can void Shia court rulings, and government departments can choose not to implement judgments rendered by Shia judges. Jurisdictionally these courts are only allowed to rule on cases in the Qatif and al-Ahsa areas; Shia from other regions cannot use such courts.

The calculation of accidental death or injury compensation is discriminatory. In the event a court renders a judgment in favor of a plaintiff who is a Jewish or Christian male, the plaintiff is only entitled to receive 50 percent of the compensation a Muslim male would receive; all other non-Muslims are only entitled to receive one-sixteenth of the amount a male Muslim would receive. Furthermore, judges may discount the testimony of non-practicing Muslims or individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam and disregard the testimony of a non-Muslim in favor of the testimony of a Muslim. Moreover, courts adhere to the Qur'anic stipulation that in cases of capital punishment the value of a woman's testimony is only one-half that of a man's.

The Majlis al-Shoura (the Consultative Council) is responsible for drafting resolutions for approval by the Council of Ministers and the king. The king appoints the Consultative Council's 150 male members and 12 non-voting female advisors. In September the king announced that women would serve on the Consultative Council as full members in 2013. Advisors can attend sessions and may offer their opinions, but have no voting power. There are five Shia members. According to the Consultative Council's charter, the members should be "scholars and men of learning." There are no term limits for the Consultative Council's members; however, every four years the king must replace 50 percent of the council.

The two mosques in Mecca and Medina do not come under MOIA jurisdiction. They are the responsibility of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Shrines, which reports directly to the king; its head holds a rank equivalent to a government minister. Thousands of other mosques exist in private homes, at rest stops along highways, and elsewhere throughout the country. There are no public non-Muslim houses of worship, but private Christian religious gatherings took place throughout the country.

The CPVPV is a semiautonomous agency authorized to monitor social behavior and enforce morality consistent with the government's interpretation of Islam. The law defines the CPVPV's mission as "guiding and advising people to observe the religious duties prescribed by Islamic Sharia, and to prevent committing [acts] proscribed and prohibited [by Sharia], or adopting bad habits and traditions or taboo [sic] heresies." The purview of the CPVPV includes public gender mixing and illegal private contact between men and women; practicing or displaying non-Muslim faiths or disrespecting Islam; displaying or selling media contrary to Islam, including pornography; producing, distributing, or consuming alcohol; venerating places or celebrating events inconsistent with approved Islamic practices; practicing sorcery or magic for profit; and committing or facilitating lewdness, including adultery, homosexuality, and gambling. Full-time CPVPV field officers are known as mutawwa'een; they do not wear uniforms, but are required to wear identification badges and can only legally act in their official capacity when accompanied by a regular policeman. In practice CPVPV officers often act as public morality enforcers. According to the latest public statistics, the CPVPV has more than 5,000 staff members, including 3,583 CPVPV field offices throughout all 13 provinces. Additionally there are over 1,600 administrative support personnel. The CPVPV reports to the king through the Council of Ministers, and the MOI oversees its operations on the king's behalf. Religious vigilantes and/or volunteers, unaffiliated with the CPVPV and acting on their own, sometimes harassed and assaulted citizens and foreigners.

The 24-member HRC was established in 2005 by the Council of Ministers to address human rights abuses and promote human rights within the country. The board does not include women, but each regional branch includes a women's branch operated and staffed by women. The board previously did not have Shia members, but now includes at least one. The HRC regularly follows up on citizen complaints, including complaints of favoritism or unfair court decisions, but has not specifically addressed issues of religious freedom and tolerance and does not issue a report on its actions.

No law specifically requires all citizens to be Muslims, but non-Muslim and many foreign and Saudi national Muslims whose beliefs are deemed not to conform with the government's interpretation of Islam must practice their religion in private and are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, detention and, for noncitizens, deportation. Children born to Muslim fathers are by law deemed Muslim, and conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy and punishable by death. Blasphemy against Sunni Islam is also punishable by death, but the more

common penalty is a long prison sentence. There have been no confirmed reports of executions for either apostasy or blasphemy in recent years.

The law discriminates against adherents of religions deemed “polytheistic” and to a lesser extent against Christians and Jews, who are mentioned in the Qur’an as “People of the Book.” The government officially does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some do so under other auspices and are generally able to hold private services. These entry restrictions make it difficult for non-Muslims to maintain regular contact with clergy. This is particularly problematic for Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, whose religious traditions require that they receive sacraments from a priest on a regular basis. However, many non-Muslims continue to gather for private worship, and the government generally allows the discreet performance of religious functions of all religious groups.

Shia face systematic and pervasive official and legal discrimination, including in education, employment, the military, housing, political representation, the judiciary, religious practice, and media. Primary reasons include historical Sunni-Shia animosity, suspicion of Iranian influence on their actions, and the view that Shia are polytheists who commit apostasy by practicing some of their religious rites.

The MOIA determines the qualifications of Sunni clerics and is responsible for investigating complaints against them, particularly clerics who issue intolerant fatwas or promote intolerance, violence, or hatred. In 2003 the MOIA created a program to monitor all government-paid clerics. Provincial committees of senior religious scholars supervise full-time MOIA employees who monitor all mosques and clerics through scheduled and unscheduled visits and receipt of public complaints. Based on their reports, the committees summon clerics accused of preaching extremist ideologies. If the provincial committees are not able to dissuade these clerics from their thinking, the clerics are referred to a central committee or dismissed. Under this program, the MOIA has removed 3,500 imams from duty since 2003, but none were removed last year. In a move to curb extremist and absurd fatwas, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz decreed in 2010 that only members of the Council of Senior [Religious] Scholars, and those whom the king permits, may issue public fatwas. This decree was still in effect last year. The MOIA also monitored and posted counter-arguments on extremist online forums and Web sites during the year.

The government requires noncitizen legal residents to carry an identity card containing a religious designation for “Muslim” or “non-Muslim.” Older residency cards bear more specific religious designations such as “Christian.”

The naturalization law requires that applicants attest to their religious affiliation and requires applicants to get a certificate endorsed by their local cleric.

Freedom of religious assembly is severely limited, as the government does not allow non-Muslims to publicly assemble based on religious affiliation. This freedom is also limited in other ways, including the government’s hindering of the establishment and maintenance of non-Sunni places of worship. All new mosques require the permission of the MOIA, the local municipality, and the provincial government, which is functionally part of the MOI. The MOIA supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of most Sunni mosques, including the hiring of clerical workers, while the other approximately 30 percent of Sunni mosques are at private residences or were built and endowed by private persons. Individuals responsible for the supervision of a mosque are selected from the local community. The imams received monthly MOIA salaries ranging from 2,500 to 5,000 riyals (\$667 to \$1,333), depending on the seniority and educational level of the individual. The MOIA estimated that in 2010 it was financially and administratively responsible for 75,000 Sunni mosques, 15,000 of which are Friday mosques (larger mosques that host Friday prayers and include a sermon), and that it employs approximately 75,000 Sunni imams and 15,000 Sunni Friday khateeb (sermon leaders) to staff these mosques.

Unlike for Sunni mosques, the government does not finance construction or maintenance of Shia mosques, and the process for obtaining a government-required license for a Shia mosque is reportedly unclear and arbitrary. However, Shia have the right to manage their own mosques and to be supervised by Shia scholars.

Discussion of sensitive religious issues such as sectarian differences is rare, and criticism of Islam is forbidden. The government prohibits the public propagation of Islamic teachings that differ from the official interpretation of Islam and restricts the public religious training of non-Sunni groups and clergy.

Officially the government allows religious materials for personal use in the country; customs officials and the CPVPV do not have the authority to confiscate personal religious materials. Furthermore, the government’s stated policy for its diplomatic and consular missions abroad is to inform foreign workers applying for visas that they have the right to worship privately and possess personal religious

materials. The government also provides the name of the offices where grievances can be filed.

Regardless of a student's personal religious traditions, public school students at all levels receive mandatory religious instruction based on the government's interpretation of Islam. Students in private international schools are not required to study Islam. Muslim students of other nationalities must obtain a waiver from the MOE to attend private international schools, but obtaining the waiver is rarely a problem. Private religious schools not based on the official interpretation of Islam are not permitted.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners and detainees.

The government generally enforced legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the year.

On December 13, Amina bint Abdulhalim Nassir, a 60-year-old Saudi woman, was beheaded in Al-Jouf, reportedly after her conviction on criminal charges of practicing "witchcraft and sorcery." On September 20, Abdul Hamid Bin Hussain Bin Moustafa al-Fakki, a Sudanese national, was beheaded in Medina, reportedly after his conviction on criminal charges of practicing "witchcraft and sorcery."

A few non-Muslim groups in different parts of the country were detained and harassed for worshipping privately. For example, on December 15, police arrested 35 Ethiopian Christians during a Christian prayer service. Authorities charged the Ethiopians with "intermingling between members of the opposite sex outside of family." The prisoners claimed that they were arrested for practicing Christianity and expected to be deported. The prisoners remained in detention as of year's end.

In mid-November, Mansor Almaribe, an Australian Shia of Iraqi descent, was arrested and convicted in the country of blasphemy and for "insulting the companions of the Prophet." He was sentenced to 500 lashes and a year in prison.

His sentence was reduced to 75 lashes and no jail time. Almaribe was allowed to return to Australia after he received his lashes.

On September 3, 2009, Hadi al-Mutif, a Sulaimaniya Ismaili Shia who had been on death row for 16 years for an offhand remark “insulting the Prophet Mohammad,” received an additional five-year sentence for criticizing the government’s justice system and human rights record on a tape smuggled out of prison and broadcast on Alhurra television in 2007. Al-Mutif remained in custody through year’s end.

In January, authorities charged two Indian Christians, Vasantha Sekhar Vara and Nese Yohan, with proselytizing. They were released from detention on July 12, and both men returned to India.

Harassment of Shia during religious worship and public gatherings continued. Authorities arrested approximately 350 Shia in the Eastern Province over the course of the year, allegedly for participating in demonstrations that began in February and continued sporadically throughout the year. By year’s end, approximately 60 Shia remained in detention.

The government’s stated policy is to permit private worship for all, including non-Muslims, and address government officials’ violation of this policy as they occur; however, the CPVPV sometimes did not respect this policy. Individuals whose ability to worship privately had been infringed could address their grievances through the MOI, the government’s official HRC, the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR, a quasi-autonomous NGO), and when appropriate, the ministry of foreign affairs. Online criticism against the CPVPV increased during the year.

The government continued to prohibit public, non-Muslim religious activities across the country and further restricted non-Sunni activities in predominantly Sunni areas. On November 2, three Shias--Sheikh Saeed al Bahhar, Mohammad Hassan al Hubail, and Hussein al Dubaisy--were arrested and detained for eight days. Although they were never formally charged with a crime, members of the community suspect that they were held for participation in nightly celebrations honoring religious events during the Islamic months of Shaban and Ramadan. The three men had previously been arrested in October 2010 and detained for two weeks for allegedly establishing a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Many of the reported abuses related to public, non-Muslim religious activities and non-Sunni activities were difficult to corroborate because of witnesses’ or victims’

fears that disclosing such information might cause harm to themselves or to others. Moreover, information regarding government practices was generally incomplete because judicial proceedings usually were closed to the public, despite provisions in the criminal procedure law that require court proceedings to be open. Many non-Muslims worshiped in secret because of continuing fear of harassment and intimidation by police or the CPVPV, as well as police detention or deportation.

Similar to recent years, there were reports that government officials confiscated religious materials during raids of Christian gatherings, but no reports that customs officials confiscated religious materials from travelers, whether Muslims or non-Muslims.

Police detained and imprisoned an unknown number of persons on charges of sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft; there were media reports throughout the year of such arrests. Anti-sorcery departments exist within the CPVPV branches across the country, with the responsibility to investigate and report incidents of “sorcery” to local police. From media reports it appeared that some accused sorcerers were charlatans or quacks but others, mainly Africans, appeared to be engaged in traditional spiritual or healing practices.

The government continued to combat extremist ideology by scrutinizing religious clerics and teachers closely and dismissing those found to be promoting intolerant and extreme views. The MOIA supervised clerics through regular inspections, surprise inspections, complaints received from worshipers, and investigations of accusations in the press.

Sunni clerics, who received government stipends, occasionally used anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and anti-Shia language in their sermons. It was common for preachers in mosques, including the mosques of Mecca and Medina, to end Friday sermons with a prayer for the well-being of Muslims and for the humiliation of polytheism and polytheists.

Most Shia expressed general concerns about discrimination in religious practice, education, employment, political representation, the judiciary, and the media.

The government generally limited public religious practice to activities that conform to the official interpretation of Islam. Practices that diverged from the official interpretation, such as celebrating Maulid Al-Nabi (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, were forbidden. Enforcement was more relaxed in some communities than in others.

For example, authorities allowed Shia in the Eastern Province city of Qatif greater freedom in their religious practices, including the public commemoration of Ashura. This event was held with minimal government interference. In other areas with large Shia populations, such as al-Ahsa and Dammam, authorities restricted Shia religious activities, including public observances of Ashura, public marches, loudspeaker broadcasts of clerics' lectures from Shia community centers, and, in some instances, gatherings within those centers.

Shia described restrictions on their visits to Mecca and Medina as interference by Riyadh-based authorities in private Muslim worship. In addition, government religious authorities continued the practice of destroying ancient Islamic historical sites.

Shia mosques in mixed religious neighborhoods reportedly were required to recite the Sunni call to prayer, which is distinct from the Shia call, at prayer times. Moreover, although Shia combine two of the five daily Sunni prayers, Shia businessmen often were forced to close their shops during all five prayer times, in accordance with the country's official Sunni practices.

The government restricted the ability of religious leaders and activists to express views perceived as or deemed critical of the religious establishment. Consequently some Shia faced obstacles in constructing their mosques. For example, provincial officials in Al-Ahsa have blocked construction of some new Shia mosques and community lecture halls as well as withdrawn some permits for existing mosques and lecture halls. Shia in other parts of the country were not allowed to build Shia-specific mosques. However, the government did approve construction of some new Shia mosques in Qatif and Al-Ahsa--sometimes after lengthy delays due to the numerous approvals required--but did not approve construction of Shia mosques in Dammam, home to many Shia.

The government did not officially recognize several centers of Shia religious instruction located in the Eastern Province, provide financial support for them, recognize certificates of educational attainment for their graduates, or provide employment for their graduates, all of which it does for Sunni religious training institutions. Unlike in previous years, none of these centers were subject to forced closures.

The government refused to approve construction or registration of Shia community centers, and Shia were thus forced to build such facilities in private homes. These community centers sometimes did not meet safety codes, and the lack of legal

recognition made their long-term financing and continuity considerably more difficult.

During the year, there was significant public discussion, including in the media, questioning the official version of religious traditions and criticizing their enforcement. However, discussion of sensitive religious issues such as sectarian differences remained limited, and criticism of Islam was forbidden. Individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam risked harassment, intimidation, and detention, and foreigners who did so risked deportation. Journalists and activists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma risked detention, travel bans, and government shutdowns of their publications.

The government continued to exclude Shia perspectives from the state's extensive religious media and broadcast programming. The government sporadically imposed bans on the importation and sale of Shia books and audiovisual products. The government also blocked access to some Web sites with religious content it considered offensive or sensitive, including the Al-Rasid Web site, in line with a broader official policy of censoring objectionable content, including political discourse and illicit materials. In addition, terms like "rejectionists," which are insulting to Shia, were commonly found in public discourse.

In higher education the government discriminated against Shia in the selection process for students, professors, and administrators at public universities. For example, Shia constituted an estimated 2 percent of professors at a leading university in al-Ahsa, an area with a population that is at least 50 percent Shiite.

At the primary and secondary levels of education in al-Ahsa, there continued to be severe underrepresentation of Shia among school principals (approximately 1 percent), and no Shia principals in al-Ahsa schools for females.

In Qatif, where Shia constitute approximately 90 percent of the population, many male principals and even some male religious teachers in primary schools were Shia; however, there were no Shia principals or religious teachers in Qatif's public female primary schools. There are a small number of private schools for girls in Qatif.

A new curriculum was implemented throughout the country in 2010 for the first, fourth, and seventh grades. All religious references in math, science, and English textbooks for these grades were removed. The new religious sciences and Arabic

textbooks for those grades, however, continued to contain intolerant language. Similar curriculum changes reportedly were implemented during the year for second, fifth, and eighth grades, although this is unconfirmed. Reform programs for the other grades were being developed at year's end, but most school children used textbooks that retained language intolerant of other religious traditions, especially Jewish, Christian, and Shia beliefs, and included commands to hate infidels for their kufr (unbelief) and kill apostates. For example, textbooks stated that apostates from Islam should be killed if they do not repent within three days of being warned and that treachery is a permanent characteristic of non-Muslims, especially Jews. The monotheism textbook for twelfth grade boys stated that those who worship tombs--a likely allusion to include Shia and Sufi Muslims' practice of visiting tombs of venerated imams--thereby commit apostasy by action. The text also stated that once a finding of apostasy has been confirmed, legal consequences apply, including that if the apostate refuses to repent, he must be killed.

Shia faced significant employment discrimination in the public sector. A very small number of Shia occupied high-level positions in government-owned companies and government agencies. Many Shia believed that openly identifying themselves as Shia would negatively affect career advancement.

Qatif community leaders described allegedly prejudicial zoning laws that prevent construction of buildings over a certain height in various Shiite neighborhoods. The leaders stated the laws prevented investment and development in these areas and aimed to limit the density of the Shia population in any given area.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that MOI officials and/or CPVPV members pressured sponsors and employers not to renew the residency cards of non-Muslims they had sponsored for employment if it was discovered or suspected that those individuals had led, sponsored, or participated in private non-Muslim worship services. Similarly, there were no reports that CPVPV members pressured employers and sponsors to reach verbal agreements with non-Muslim employees that they would not participate in private non-Muslim worship services.

Members of the Shia minority were also subjected to political discrimination. For example, although Shia constituted approximately 10 to 15 percent of the citizen population and approximately one-third to one-half of the Eastern Province population, they were underrepresented in senior government positions. Shia were significantly underrepresented in national security-related positions, including the ministry of defense and aviation, the national guard, and the MOI. Shia were better represented in the ranks of traffic police, municipalities, and public schools

in predominantly Shiite areas. There were no Shia ministers, deputy ministers, governors, deputy governors, or ministry branch directors in the Eastern Province, and only three of the 59 government-appointed municipal council members were Shia. However, the Shia were represented proportionally among the elected members of the municipal councils, as they held 10 of 11 seats on the Qatif and al-Ahsa councils. An elected Shia headed the Qatif municipal council. However, the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council)--the 150-member, all-male, all-appointed national body that advises the king --only has five Shia members.

Judicial discrimination against Shia was evident during the year. Shia leaders argued that the one court of appeals on which Shia judges sit has no real authority and only verifies documents.

In addition to these discriminatory practices, Nakhawala leaders stated that the Shia in their community faced even more problems, particularly in comparison to the Twelvers in the Eastern Province. They stated that anti-Shia sermons and statements were heard regularly in their neighborhoods. Unlike the case with Shia from the Eastern Province, there were no prominent Nakhawala Shia in government bodies such as the Consultative Council or the HRC. The Nakhawala also asserted that their surname (“al-Nakhly,” which roughly translates as “farmers” and identifies their minority status and sect) facilitated systematic discrimination against them in employment and education.

The Sulaimaniya Ismaili community also continued to face additional obstacles in Najran Province. Community leaders asserted that the government discriminated against them by prohibiting their religious books; allowing Sunni religious leaders to declare them unbelievers; denying them government employment; and relocating them from the southwest to other parts of the country or encouraging them to emigrate.

The government-run King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) was staffed by 2,000 certified trainers. Over the past six years, the KACND has trained over 800,000 men and women in over 20,000 training programs in 42 cities on “the culture and importance of open dialogue and communication skills.” The center trained 352 teachers on “Educational Dialogue in the Classroom.” In rural areas, the “Caravan of Dialogue” program trained 848 young people, distributed 1,500 informational packets, and worked with local imams to include the concepts of dialogue in their Friday sermons. Under their “Dialogue Café” program, the center trained 247 university students on the principles of dialogue.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Educational improvements included the removal of intolerant religious references in math, science, and English textbooks in grades one, four, and seven. The MOE claimed similar revisions have been implemented in grades two, five, and eight, although these claims were not verified by year's end. The MOE also reported the launch of a pilot program of selected revised textbooks in grades three and six, which are expected to be implemented nationwide in 2012. Also, a committee has reportedly been formed to review the high school curriculum, though no changes were made to those textbooks this year. The MOE also issued a ruling in February to withdraw books that incited violence and extremism from public school libraries. The MOIA confirmed it continues to monitor educational materials used at religious summer camps to prevent the teaching of extremist ideologies to children. Some teachers were trained on promoting dialogue.

The king continued a national dialogue campaign to increase tolerance and encourage moderation and understanding. The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue continued to host intercultural dialogues throughout the year, including a November dialogue between Saudi and American women. During the year, a mix of high-level government and religious officials openly supported this campaign, including an October statement in Vienna by the foreign minister. They advocated against religious extremism and intolerant language, especially in mosques and schools. The KACND partnered with UNESCO to conduct two international trainings on dialogue. The center continued to conclude memoranda of understanding with government ministries and institutions, including the MOIA, the CPVPV, universities, and charities. The center trained CPVPV members on "Successful Dialogue" and "Communication Skills" in two regional branches.

In October, the country, together with Austria and Spain, signed the founding document of the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue located in Vienna. The Center's board has already convened, and the Center is expected to be fully operational in late 2012.

Additionally some leading government and religious officials, including the king and crown prince, made strong public statements against extremism and instead advocated tolerance and moderation. For example, on September 20, during a conference on Takfiri ideology (the denouncement of Muslims and non-Muslims as infidels, without sufficient religious justification, in order to sanction violence or political dissent), Crown Prince Naif delivered a speech on behalf of the king to 500 Muslim scholars in attendance, reaffirming the government's commitment to

work for international peace and reconciliation and to continue to pursue extremists. The conference concluded with a recommendation to establish a league of Muslim scholars to exchange ideas on ways to counter extremist ideologies.

Individuals reportedly were able to bring personal Bibles, crosses, DVDs of sermons, and other religious materials into the country without difficulty.

On July 17, Shiite blog and news Web site Rasid.com reported the reopening of three Shia mosques in Dammam and Al Khobar that had been shuttered since 2008 and 2009.

Other improvements included augmented efforts to curb and investigate harassment by the CPVPV (particularly through specialized training to improve the performance of the CPVPV) and increased media coverage and criticism of the CPVPV.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In addition to the religious basis on which the government claims its authority and the significant role of the country's religious leadership, the culture also exerts intense pressure on the population to conform to socio-religious norms. As a result, a majority of citizens supported a state based on Islamic law, although there were differing views as to how this should be realized in practice.

Shia faced significant employment discrimination in the private sector. There was no formal policy concerning the hiring and promotion of Shia in the private sector, but anecdotal evidence suggested that in some companies, including the oil and petrochemical industries, a "glass ceiling" existed and Shia were passed over for less-qualified Sunni colleagues.

Discrimination based on religion was a factor in the mistreatment of foreign workers by citizen employers and coworkers.

Religious vigilantes and/or volunteers unaffiliated with the CPVPV also exist but often act alone, sometimes even harassing and assaulting citizens and foreigners. For example, in early March at the annual Riyadh Book Fair a group of conservative preachers circulated among the booths instructing foreign women to

cover their hair. Some loudly confronted the minister of culture and information for selling books they claimed were destructive to Islam and for allowing female journalists to attend the event. The CPVPV issued a press statement denying any affiliation with these individuals and clarified that members of the organization all carry badges and are escorted by police officers.

Media criticism of government educational materials continued during the year.

Editorial cartoons occasionally exhibited anti-Semitism characterized by stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, particularly at times of heightened political tensions with Israel. For example, on November 26 the daily newspaper *Al-Jazirah* showed a caricatured Orthodox Jew with a cleaver presumably preparing to kill a physically beaten Arab who is holding up a peace sign. Anti-Semitic editorial comments sometimes appeared in government and private print and electronic media in response to regional events.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. policy is to press the government to respect religious freedom and honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote respect for non-Muslim religious belief, and combat violent extremism. Senior U.S. government officials raised these issues at the highest levels within the MOIA, MOI, MOJ, HRC, MOE, and Ministry of Culture and Information during the year. U.S. government officials also continued to meet with minority religious groups to discuss religious freedom concerns, including Shia groups and non-Muslim expatriates.

Additionally, the U.S. government regularly included Saudi officials in U.S. visitor programs to promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue. On August 18, the secretary of state redesignated Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In connection with this redesignation, the secretary issued a waiver of sanctions on the same date “to further the purposes of the act.”