

THE NETHERLANDS 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects the freedom of individuals to profess their religion or belief. It is a crime to engage in public speech inciting religious hatred. In August the government implemented a ban of face coverings in schools and some public spaces, but institutions involved with enforcing the law expressed reluctance to enforce the ban. In April the country's highest administrative court ruled the government must finance and facilitate the establishment of an Islamic primary school in Westland after the city council there denied the school a permit. The national railway company began accepting applications for compensation to Jewish and other survivors, as well as close relatives of deceased persons, whom it had transported to transit camps ultimately leading to concentration camps during the Nazi occupation. In May the government allocated three million euros (\$3.4 million) to combat anti-Semitism after the Jewish community requested greater government attention to the issue. Construction of the National Holocaust Monument in Amsterdam started on July 9, after the Amsterdam Administrative Court dismissed all objections to its development. Politicians from several parties made anti-Muslim or anti-Semitic statements during the year.

Government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported hundreds of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents, involving nonlethal violence, threats, harassment, discrimination, hate speech, and vandalism. One NGO reported 182 anti-Semitic incidents during the year, compared with 135 in 2018. Police registered 275 anti-Semitic incidents in 2018, slightly less than in 2017, and 137 incidents against Muslims, a decline of 29 percent from 2017. There were two violent anti-Semitic incidents reported by NGOs involving homes of Jewish families. A study by the European Commission found 65 percent of respondents viewed anti-Semitism as a problem in the country. According to Report Islamophobia, 95 percent of the Muslims it surveyed said they had experienced an anti-Muslim incident in the previous five years. The Jewish community expressed worry about increasing anti-Semitism and said many members avoided attending Jewish events or wearing Jewish symbols or clothing in public. Monitoring organizations said there were increases in anti-Muslim hate speech online and protests near mosques, particularly by what they consider extremist groups, and that many instances of workplace discrimination against Muslims were directed at women wearing headscarves. In October an Amsterdam court sentenced an

Afghan man, who stabbed two U.S. citizens in 2018 because of what he said were Dutch insults to Islam, to almost 27 years in prison.

The U.S. embassy and consulate general in Amsterdam emphasized the importance of support for all faiths and interfaith dialogue in formal meetings and informal conversations with government officials – including at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Justice and Security, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Education, Culture, and Science, and of local governments – and with parliamentarians. Embassy and consulate general representatives discussed religious freedom issues with leaders of several different faith communities and a broad range of civil society. In April the Ambassador spoke about the history of religious tolerance in the United States and the relationship between the Christian communities of the United States and the Netherlands to a public television broadcaster. During the international Istanbul Process conference in November on combating religious intolerance, a senior Department of State official spoke on implementing measures to combat intolerance based on religion or belief.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 17.2 million (midyear 2019 estimate). In a 2017 survey of persons age 15 or older by Statistics Netherlands, an official source of government statistics, 51 percent of the population declared no church affiliation, 23.6 percent self-identified as Roman Catholic, 14.9 percent as Protestant (6.4 percent Reformed, 2.9 percent Calvinist, and 5.6 percent unspecified Protestant), 5.1 percent as Muslim, and 5.6 percent as “other,” including Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, and Baha’i.

Most Muslims live in urban areas and are of Turkish, Moroccan, or Surinamese background. The Muslim population also includes recent immigrants and asylum seekers from other countries, including Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While there are no official estimates, most Muslims are believed to be Sunni. The Liberal Jewish Community, the largest Jewish community in the country, estimates there are 40,000-50,000 Jews. A Statistics Netherlands study from 2015, the most recent available, estimates the number of Hindus at 10,000, of whom approximately 85 percent are of Surinamese descent and 10 percent of Indian descent. The Buddhist community has approximately 17,000 members, according to a 2007 report by the governmental Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), the most recent estimate available.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and provides for the freedom of individuals to profess their religion or belief, individually or in community with others, without affecting their responsibilities under the law. The constitution allows the government to restrict the exercise of religious beliefs outside of buildings or enclosed spaces to protect health, ensure traffic safety, and prevent disorder.

The law makes it a crime to engage in public speech that incites religious hatred and provides a penalty of imprisonment for up to two years, a fine of up to 8,100 euros (\$9,100), or both. To qualify as hate speech, statements must be directed at a group of persons; the law does not consider statements targeted at a philosophy or religion, such as “Islam” (as opposed to “Muslims”) as criminal hate speech.

The law does not require religious groups to register with the government. If the tax authorities determine a group meets specific criteria, they grant it exemptions from all taxes, including income, value-added, and property taxes. Under the tax law, to qualify for tax exemptions such groups must be “of a philosophical or religious nature,” contribute to the general welfare of society, and be nonprofit and nonviolent.

On August 1, the ban on full-face coverings – including ski masks, helmets, *niqabs*, and burqas – in schools, hospitals, public transportation, and government buildings – came into force. According to the law, authorities must first ask individuals violating the ban to remove the face covering or to leave the premises. Those refusing to comply may be fined 150 euros (\$170).

The law permits employees to refuse to work on Sundays for religious reasons, but employers may deny employees such an exception depending on the nature of the work, such as employment in the health sector. Members of religious communities for whom the Sabbath is not Sunday may request similar exemptions.

The Council of State and the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) are responsible for reviewing complaints of religious discrimination. The Council of State is the highest administrative court in the country, and its rulings are binding. The NIHR serves as the government’s independent human rights watchdog, responsible for advising the government and monitoring and highlighting such

issues, including those pertaining to religion. The NIHR hears complaints of religious discrimination, often involving labor disputes, and issues opinions that do not carry the force of law but with which the addressed parties tend to comply. If they do not comply with NIHR's opinion, plaintiffs may take their case to a regular court.

Local governments appoint antidiscrimination boards that work independently under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. These local boards provide information on how to report complaints and mediate disputes, including those pertaining to discrimination based on religion. Parties involved in disputes are not forced to accept mediation decisions of the local boards.

The government provides funding to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and religious healthcare facilities. To qualify for funding, institutions must meet government educational standards as well as minimum class size and healthcare requirements. The constitution stipulates that standards required of religious or ideology-based (termed "special") schools, financed either in part or fully by the government, shall be regulated by law with due regard for the freedom of these schools to provide education according to their religion or ideology.

The constitution stipulates public education shall pay due respect to the individual's religion or belief. The law permits, but does not require, religious education in public schools. Teachers with special training to do so teach classes about a specific religion or its theology in some public schools, and enrollment in these classes is optional. All schools are required to familiarize students with the various religious movements in society, regardless of the school's religious affiliation. Religion-based schools that are government funded are free to determine the content of their religious classes and make them mandatory, if the education inspectorate agrees that such education does not incite criminal offenses. Approximately 71 percent of government-funded schools have a religious, humanist, or philosophical basis. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science is responsible for setting national curriculum standards that all schools must comply with and for monitoring compliance.

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

Government Practices

The August 1 implementation of the law banning full-face coverings – including *niqabs* and burqas – in schools, hospitals, public transportation, and government buildings generated societal debate. On August 9, a few dozen women wearing *niqabs* and other supporters demonstrated against the ban in The Hague. They argued the ban limited the individual freedom of women and isolated Muslim women who might be afraid to take their children to school or a hospital. Advocates of the ban insisted that the law be enforced, including one advocate, Party for Freedom (PVV) leader and Member of Parliament Geert Wilders, who described it as a prelude to a future ban on headscarves. Opponents of the law viewed it as largely symbolic, since the number of women wearing a *niqab* or burka in the country was very small, estimated by officials to be between 150 and 400. The Federation of Islamic Organizations, among others, urged authorities not to enforce the law.

The institutions involved in the ban expressed reluctance to enforce it, stating the ban should not interfere with their regular business. Hospitals stated they would never refuse care to a woman for wearing a *niqab*. Public transportation companies stated they were obliged to transport anyone with a valid ticket and objected to any interruption of their regular service. Police stated they would not prioritize responses if called about these types of incidents. Following the introduction of the ban, there were two incidents, one involving a bus in Stein, Limburg, on August 19, and the other a train at Rotterdam Central Station on September 16, in which women wearing *niqabs* refused to show their faces or to leave the vehicles. In both cases, the women eventually left the vehicles after police insisted on compliance with the law, and neither was fined. Activists posted video on Facebook showing the train conductor involved in one of the incidents, who became the target of threats.

After the ban came into force, the local Rotterdam-based Islamic political party NIDA offered to pay the fine on behalf of any woman cited for violating the face-covering ban, stating it viewed the ban as an infringement on religious freedom. The women's rights organization Femmes for Freedom filed a complaint against NIDA, stating that NIDA was breaking the law by offering to pay the fine.

The Central Appeal Council, one of the highest administrative courts, ruled on several cases in February in which social welfare recipients refused employment and training based on religious belief. In one case, a Muslim man refused to shave off his beard, a requirement for wearing a safety hood in a specific training job. The council ruled that in this case the legal requirement of wearing the safety hood,

which protected the employee, outweighed the individual's right to freedom of religion.

During the campaign for March provincial council elections, PVV leader Wilders reiterated that his party's primary objective was to promote the "de-Islamization of the Netherlands" through a series of measures, including closing all mosques and Islamic schools, banning the Quran, and shutting out all asylum seekers and immigrants from Muslim-majority countries. He used social media to disseminate his message. Wilders' Twitter account contained hundreds of entries criticizing Islam. For example, on September 27, Wilders tweeted, "Islam is a sect of hatred and violence. Islam and freedom do not go together, anywhere. That is why all Islamic schools and mosques must be shut..." On April 22, he tweeted, "We need (inter)national laws to declare Islam a violent totalitarian ideology. We should not grant freedom to a doctrine that takes our freedom away from us."

In May the Council of State – which reviews and issues advisory opinions on any legislation before it is considered in parliament – issued a negative opinion on a draft law Wilders proposed in 2018 that would close mosques and schools teaching Islamic ideology, ban the Quran and the wearing of a burqa or *niqab* in public, and levy substantial fines on violators. According to the council, the proposed legislation "seriously and unacceptably devalues the core elements of the democratic rule of law and violates the constitutional right of freedom of religion." The council rejected Wilders' assertion that Islam is "a totalitarian ideology of conquest" and stated the redefinition of a religion is illegal. Wilders stated he intended to proceed with the parliamentary review of his proposal; no other party supported the bill. Parliament had not scheduled a debate on the draft law by year's end.

Wilders' appeal at the Hague Appellate Court of his 2016 conviction for inciting discrimination and making insulting racial remarks about Moroccans at a 2014 rally continued at year's end.

The Forum for Democracy Party did not support the PVV campaign for "de-Islamization" of the country and closure of all mosques, but party leader Thierry Baudet stated Islam posed a threat to society, opposed the construction of new mosques, objected to school visits to mosques, characterized submitting children to fasting during Ramadan as child abuse, and favored amending the constitutional right to freedom of education to preclude the foundation of Islamic schools.

On September 12, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment Wouter Koolmees and Minister for Legal Protection Sander Dekker wrote a letter to parliament based on findings from a task force the government created to advise and assist with what it described as problematic behavior within the Salafist community. The ministers stated Muslim communities were those most affected by “the problematic influence of these Salafist protagonists, as a result of which children turn their back on society,” and because others blamed the Muslim community as a whole for the problems of a small group. They added the government supported Islamic voices who spoke out against problematic behavior. Created in 2018, after a 2017 Ministry of Social Affairs report stating Salafist groups were growing and promoting intolerance, the task force worked with police, local authorities, and communities. A February 11 letter from Koolmees to parliament stated the government focused only on “criminal and/or problematic behavior from the perspective of the democratic rule of law within segments of the Salafist movement.”

Parliament continued to pressure the government to counter the foreign funding of Dutch mosques and Islamic institutions to stop the influence of Salafist and radical ideas. The government worked on legislation to make foreign financing transparent but stated it was reluctant to ban foreign financing altogether, considering potential diplomatic repercussions, erosion of national credibility on human rights and the rule of law, and possible negative repercussions to national NGOs active abroad. It also worked on legislation to ban financing of civil society organizations from “unfree” countries and to obtain more powers to ban entities whose activities violate public order, but it had not presented either piece of legislation to parliament as year’s end.

The press reported in September that 44 of the 52 Islamic primary schools used a sexual diversity textbook that states boys and girls should not look at each other or wear clothing of “the infidel,” and that “Allah despises homosexuality.” The Education Inspectorate saw no reason to intervene because the “basic values of the democratic rule of law are not violated.”

The Education Inspectorate reproached the Jewish Cheder primary school and the Islamic Cornelius Haga Lyceum for using inappropriate civics curricula based on their own interpretation of religious rules. Both schools received government funds that required them to adhere to a minimum state requirement on curriculum content. Authorities found problems with the Jewish Cheder primary school’s religious curriculum not including information on homosexuality and the school’s policy of separating boys and girls into different religious classes instead of

holding mixed-gender classes. Authorities had no concerns with Islamic Cornelius Haga Lyceum's curriculum but found problems with its management. Media also reported that most private afterschool Salafist classes taught their students a strict interpretation of Islam and to turn their back on Dutch society.

There was growing political pressure from various secular parties, including Labor Party and Democrats 66, to amend Article 23 of the constitution that guarantees freedom of education, to give the minister of education the power to intervene in order to prevent the foundation of schools supporting radical and undemocratic views. In response, Education Minister Arie Slob of the Christian Union (CU) party stated, "Parents must be able to choose a school that befits their education. It is wrong to assume that problems can be resolved by restricting the freedoms of a certain group."

In July the city council of the predominantly Christian community of Westland denied a permit to start an Islamic primary school, even though the school met the criteria, according to Minister of Education, Culture, and Science Ingrid van Engelshoven. In April the Council of State ruled the Ministry of Education must facilitate and finance the new school over the objections of local authorities. There were continuing discussions between the Ministry of Education and the local government at year's end.

On August 5, the national railway company Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) began accepting online applications for compensation to Jewish, Roma, and Sinti Holocaust victims whom NS transported to transit camps ultimately leading to concentration and extermination camps during World War II when the country was under Nazi occupation. The company said it would pay between 7,500 and 15,000 euros (\$8,400-\$16,900) to an estimated 500 Holocaust survivors and 5,000 widows and children. The application window was scheduled to remain open until August 5, 2020.

The government continued to state that it accepted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism but was not legally bound by it. In February the government reported the Ministry of Justice and Security shared the indicators from this definition with the police and prosecutor's office so that they could take them into account when dealing with incidents of anti-Semitism.

In February the government presented the annual update of its *National Action Plan Against Discrimination*, which included specific measures to counter anti-

Islamic sentiment and anti-Semitism. It stated the government must continue to implement existing measures vigorously. These included projects to train teachers to deal with discrimination issues including on the basis of religion, and leading figures from the Jewish and Muslim communities to serve as constructive societal leaders and encouragement of interfaith dialogue through the Building Bridges project, which establishes local networks of persons from different religious communities. The update tightened the instructions for the prosecutor's office to facilitate prosecution of discriminatory expression, including religious, on social media. The government also appropriated nine million euros (\$10.1 million) for the education work by museums and commemoration centers, the Anne Frank Foundation, and the National May 4 and 5 Committee to incorporate contemporary issues, such as combating anti-Semitism and discrimination, into education on World War II.

In May the cabinet appropriated three million euros (\$3.4 million) to enhance existing efforts to combat anti-Semitism following an April paper by parliamentarians Gert-Jan Segers of the CU party and Dilan Yesilgoz of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), which made concrete proposals to combat anti-Semitism and other calls for action. The paper proposed the following measures: improving mandatory education about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, including the history of the Jewish community in the country; increasing support to teachers to raise these subjects in the classroom; creating a safe environment at school; reaching out to Jewish youth; focusing attention on the Holocaust, World War II, and freedom of religion in the mandatory integration courses for immigrants; providing structural security to Jewish institutes and synagogues; training police to recognize anti-Semitism; promoting policies to encourage victims to file complaints with police; pursuing zero tolerance with respect to anti-Semitism on the internet and during soccer matches; appointing a national anti-Semitism coordinator; and developing an action plan to combat anti-Semitism. Segers stated, "We have failed if we cannot offer a safe existence to the Jewish community..."

In January several political parties in Amsterdam presented a nine-point plan to combat anti-Semitism more effectively, including: stimulating improved education on the Holocaust and the history of Jews in the capital; fighting prejudice; requiring every student to visit Westerbork Camp (from which Jews and others were transported to concentration camps to the east); launching a campaign to encourage victims of anti-Semitic incidents to file complaints; and advocating the appointment of a local coordinator for combating anti-Semitism in Amsterdam. The city implemented these measures during the year.

The mayors and responsible aldermen in larger cities, such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, again met with the Jewish community to discuss security issues and other topics of interest. These city governments continued to support a range of projects, such as educational programs to teach primary schoolchildren about the Holocaust and to counter prejudice about Jews. Amsterdam, with the largest Jewish population in the country, remained particularly active in such programming and sponsored visits of school children to the Westerbork Camp. On a March visit to the Westerbork Camp, State Secretary for Health, Welfare, and Sport Paul Blokhuis expressed his desire to make the discussion of anti-Semitism in the classroom mandatory. In May The Hague said it would finance school excursions to the Westerbork and Auschwitz concentration camps.

In May the NGO Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) proposed several measures to combat anti-Semitism more effectively: improve education on the Holocaust and Jews; help teachers recognize and combat anti-Semitism; teach immigrants about the Holocaust, Jews, and democratic rule of law; identify anti-Semitic incidents more clearly; accelerate the reporting procedures for such incidents; encourage victims to report incidents; train policemen in handling anti-Semitism complaints; impose heavier penalties on anti-Semitism; make clearer agreements with the Royal Netherlands Soccer Association (KNVB) about halting matches after an anti-Semitic incident; and observe zero tolerance for criminal discrimination online, including anti-Semitism. The government began implementation of several of recommendations, while others remained pending.

CIDI organized a demonstration in front of the Dutch parliament on May 29 to support the wearing of the yarmulke, or *kippah*, after the German government's anti-Semitism ombudsman warned Jews not to wear them in public because of the increasing likelihood of being attacked. During this demonstration Justice and Security Minister Ferdinand Grapperhaus and spokespersons of the main political parties expressed solidarity with the Jewish community and spoke out for a more vigorous approach to combat anti-Semitism.

Local governments, in consultation with the national government, continued to provide security to all Jewish institutions. Eddo Verdoner, chairman of the Central Jewish Council (CJO), said his organization worked closely with national and local authorities to provide security to Jewish institutions so that Jews could feel safe without withdrawing from society. The volunteer organization For Life and Welfare also provided private security to Jewish institutions and events.

Local governments continued to provide security to mosques and Islamic institutions as necessary, and local authorities worked with Islamic institutions on enhancing the security and resilience of mosques and other religious institutes, as well as their visitors. The national government continued to support this local approach and developed materials to assist religious institutes and local governments in implementation measures. The national government published a “Security of Religious Institutes” manual in consultation with the Muslim community, local governments, and police. Local and national authorities, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), and police consulted closely on security issues with representatives from religious communities.

In January Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema announced the city would provide more security to Islamic institutions based on threat assessments by local and national authorities. The city engaged in talks with Islamic institutions on maximizing security and adopted supplemental security measures, similar to those it adopted in previous years for Jewish institutions.

In response to the March attacks on mosques in New Zealand, Justice and Security Minister Grapperhaus informed parliament that authorities were closely monitoring threats, and the NCTV maintained close contacts with local authorities, which in turn consulted with mosques on increased security measures, including greater police presence but also increasing self-reliance of mosques to protect themselves by discussing best practices, including installing closed-circuit television cameras and monitoring who is entering the mosque. The NCTV also met with the Dutch Islamic Council, and local mayors visited mosques.

Several politicians and the CJO condemned the October 9 attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany. “Sickening, cowardly, and terrible,” tweeted VVD parliamentarian Dilan Yesilgoz. The CJO asked if anti-Semitism was on the rise in Europe and wrote, “The CJO calls in the Netherlands for education and information. Only by knowing each other do we diminish mutual hatred...CJO calls on everyone not to be intimidated. Be yourself and live your culture without fear.”

On May 3, the CU and Reformed Calvinist parties and CIDI launched a petition calling on the European Commission to make combating anti-Semitism in Europe one of its priorities. They stated Jews continued to be targets of prejudice and hatred and synagogues and Jewish schools required protection. The petition also

called for a more effective approach of anti-Semitism in Europe. Within a few weeks, more than 19,000 people had signed the petition, including several leading politicians from other parties.

The NIHR reported receiving 17 complaints of religious discrimination in 2018 – mostly in the workplace – compared with 13 in 2017 and issued opinions in nine cases. In one case, it judged that a primary school did not make a prohibited distinction on the grounds of religion when it refused to offer an internship to a woman who refused to shake hands with men. The NIHR stated the school policy on etiquette was consistent and objective. In another case, it judged that a Protestant school could elect not to hire a teacher wearing a headscarf because the school held a consistent and legitimate policy prohibiting clothing reflecting non-Christian religious beliefs based on the school's Protestant values.

The Animal Rights Party introduced draft legislation to ban ritual slaughter of animals. In May the Council of State said the proposed legislation “constitutes a serious infringement on freedom of religion, violates the human rights of Jews and Muslims,” and should therefore not be introduced. The council stated that the interest of protecting animal welfare did not outweigh the freedom of religion. Animal Rights Party leader Marianne Thieme stated she would continue to seek parliamentary support for the ban. At year's end, parliament had not scheduled a debate on the proposed legislation.

In June parliament adopted a nonbinding resolution calling for the deployment of specialized detectives to deal with complaints about anti-Semitic incidents or other incidents of discrimination. Parliamentarians of several parties, including Democrats 66, Labor Party, and Denk, stated they hoped the measure would encourage victims to file complaints. According to CIDI, those who reported an incident often believed police did not take them seriously, and in some cases this dissuaded them from filing a complaint.

Government and security officials met throughout the year with the Jewish community to discuss matters of concern, such as security, anti-Semitism, and ritual slaughter. The CJO; Netherlands-Jewish Congregation; Netherlands Alliance of Progressive Judaism; Contact Body for Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and CIDI attended such meetings.

In its most recent report covering the year, CIDI reported three anti-Semitic statements by politicians from the Denk Party and PVV. For example, the report cited multiple anti-Semitic comments on Facebook in response to a video posted

by Denk party leader Tunahan Kuzu while visiting Palestinians in Hebron, such as “The Holocaust never happened, it was invented by Jews to snatch away land”; “Zionist Jews do the same as what Hitler did”; and “If Hitler had dealt with Jews properly, Palestine would be free today.” CIDI criticized Denk for failing to remove the comments.

Citing freedom of expression, authorities in Amsterdam declined to act against the weekly demonstration of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement at the Dam Square, despite the frequent use of anti-Semitic texts and Israeli flags covered in swastika and cockroach designs. CIDI appealed directly to the mayor to intervene after police did not respond to repeated complaints; the mayor’s office took no action.

Government ministers, including Prime Minister Mark Rutte, regularly spoke out against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in speeches, such as at the annual Auschwitz and Kristallnacht commemorations. In a speech on September 12, Justice and Security Minister Grapperhaus stated, “Religious intolerance, anti-Semitism is a multiheaded monster. I cannot phrase it differently. It is a despicable fact that there are still people with anti-Semitic delusions.” On May 4, the national World War II commemoration day, Deputy Prime Minister Hugo de Jonge gave a speech at the Holocaust commemoration site at Westerbork Camp warning against indifference toward anti-Semitism. In October State Secretary for Health, Welfare, and Sport Blokhuis, also responsible for World War II commemorations, announced an appropriation of 15 million euros (\$16.9 million) for Holocaust and World War II commemoration projects.

Although authorities, the KNVB, soccer clubs, and the Anne Frank Foundation had multiple agreements in place to discourage anti-Semitic behavior at soccer matches, participants did not always carry out the terms of the agreements. For example, one agreement stipulated that if anti-Semitic chanting arose, clubs would ask fans to stop immediately and, if they did not, suspend the match; however, the matches were rarely suspended. In one example, on January 27, Feyenoord soccer club hooligans engaged in anti-Semitic chanting outside the stadium in Rotterdam ahead of the Feyenoord-Ajax match. Police intervened and arrested five supporters, who were fined 500 euros (\$560) each. That same day, similar chanting occurred ahead of a match between Heerenveen and AZ Alkmaar. AZ Alkmaar developed a policy to discourage such chanting, which it said was becoming more effective.

The Anne Frank Foundation continued to organize government-sponsored and government-funded projects, such as the “Fan Coach” project that sought to counter anti-Semitic chanting by educating soccer fans on why their actions were anti-Semitic. Another foundation initiative, the “Fair Play” project, promoted discussion about countering discrimination, including religious discrimination among soccer fans.

In April several political parties and CIDI urged the state secretary for migration to deny a U.S.-based preacher entry to the country because of what they described as his offensive anti-Semitic and homophobic statements based on his own biblical interpretations. The preacher canceled the visit.

In January the government, most political parties, the Protestant Church Netherlands (PKN), and other groups protested the signing by approximately 250 Protestant ministers and others of the evangelical Christian Nashville Statement on the relationship between men and women, which rejected homosexuality and transgender identity. On behalf of the government, Education Minister Ingrid van Engelshoven said the statement showed “emancipation is far from over. This is a step back in time. We still have a long way to go.” PKN president Rene de Reuver characterized the Nashville statement as “theologically one-sided and pastorally irresponsible.”

The Central Body for Accommodating Asylum Seekers (COA) – the agency charged with overseeing asylum centers – said it prohibited religious activities in the centers to avoid inflaming tensions among different religious groups housed together in an already sensitive environment. COA continued to prohibit religiously affiliated organizations from proselytizing at asylum centers. It allowed the Consultation Body for Jews, Christians, and Muslims (OJCM), however, to organize pilot programs at two asylum centers discussing freedom of religion and the importance of nondiscrimination in Dutch society. The OJCM requested COA to allow it to organize such talks at all asylum centers.

The government continued to require asylum seekers seeking to obtain a residence permit to sign a statement of participation in civic integration. The statement informed immigrants of their rights and obligations and of fundamental values, including freedom of religion.

The government continued to require imams and other spiritual leaders recruited from abroad to complete a course on integrating into Dutch society before preaching in the country. This requirement did not apply to clergy from EU

countries and those with association agreements with the EU, such as Turkey, whose Religious Affairs Directorate appoints approximately 140 Turkish imams to serve in the Netherlands. The government also sponsored leadership courses intended to facilitate imam training in Dutch.

After the Amsterdam Administrative Court dismissed all objections to its development on July 9, construction started on the National Holocaust Monument in Amsterdam, which is government and privately supported and will carry the names of all 102,000 Dutch victims of the Holocaust. Local residents said the monument was too large, the expected large numbers of visitors would become a nuisance, and the residents were not sufficiently consulted.

At the request of parliament, in July the cabinet appointed Jos Douma as the first Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief. Douma stated his goal was to promote tolerance: “The issue is that we protect people, whether they are believers or not.” The Democrats 66 party requested that the envoy also speak out vigorously on the rights of nonbelievers.

An investigation begun in 2018 into whether spokespersons for the Muslim NIDA and Unity parties broke the law with anti-Semitic statements in 2017 continued at year’s end.

According to Minister of Justice and Security Grapperhaus, the National Police continued to disregard an NIHR finding and continued with a policy of not allowing personnel to wear headscarves.

The government is a member of the IHRA.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of violence, threats, discrimination, verbal abuse, and vandalism against Jews and Muslims. Agencies collecting data on such incidents stated many occurrences went unreported. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

CIDI reported 182 anti-Semitic incidents during the year, compared with 135 in 2018. CIDI also reported 127 incidents of hate speech online during the year compared with 95 in 2018. These included two violent incidents, 59 incidents of intimidation, 32 incidents occurring during the course of daily life (such as at

school and work or among neighbors), 14 incidents of vandalism, and 152 incidents of hate speech, including 127 online. On September 19, an unknown man stopped his car next to an individual recognizable as Jewish and expressed profanities and spit at his face before driving on – spitting in the face is a violent incident under Dutch law. On June 25, a person from Brabant reported she was called by her neighbors “a cancer Jew,” allegedly because she was incorrectly perceived as Jewish, although she is not. On April 26, a law enforcement officer in Rotterdam heard someone shouting at a subway station, “All Jews should be killed.” CIDI stated it believed the overall vulgarization in public discourse contributed to the higher number of incidents. CIDI stated the registered incidents were likely only a small fraction of all incidents and pointed to a 2018 study by the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights, which found that only 25 percent of Dutch respondents who were victims of anti-Semitism in the previous five years had reported the incident or filed a complaint to police.

Police reported 275 anti-Semitic incidents in 2018 – compared with 284 in the previous year – constituting 8 percent of all discriminatory incidents registered by police. Most incidents occurred in the immediate living environment of those targeted, often involving insults from neighbors or anti-Semitic graffiti or written threats on walls, mailboxes, or personal property. Approximately 57 percent of anti-Semitic incidents involved the use of slurs. Persons frequently shouted at police officers, calling them “Jews.” Ten incidents were soccer related, including the chanting of “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas.” Twenty-nine incidents concerned vandalism involving swastikas or anti-Semitic texts sprayed on property and, in one case, a Jewish monument.

The antidiscrimination boards received 48 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2018, 1 percent of all reports, compared with 67 reports of anti-Semitic events in 2017. Most concerned aggression against Jews, including slurs or disputes between neighbors, soccer-related incidents, or vandalism. The National Expertise Center for Discrimination, part of the prosecutor’s office dealing exclusively with cases of discrimination, reported that it processed 79 new cases of discrimination in 2018, of which 19 percent were related to anti-Semitism and 13 percent were related to anti-Muslim sentiment.

Police registered 137 incidents against Muslims in 2018 (the most recent year for which data was available) including harassment, verbal abuse, and vandalism, compared with 192 in 2017. Multiple incidents concerned harassment of women on the street because they were wearing a headscarf, as well as incidents involving anti-Muslim stickers and posters. For example, in one report an unknown man told

a woman at a shopping mall “get lost to your own country. You are not allowed to walk around here with a headscarf.” The police also found stickers saying “Islamists not welcome. Identitarian Resistance.” A dozen incidents targeted mosques.

Antidiscrimination boards registered 200 anti-Muslim incidents in 2018 – compared with 192 in the previous year – half of which concerned experiences in the labor market and workplace, often involving women who were discriminated against for wearing a headscarf. For example, a Muslim woman participating in an internship at a healthcare facility was told her internship would be terminated if she did not remove her headscarf, in response to patient complaints. The woman was assigned a different internship.

CIDI categorized two incidents as violent during the year. In one incident, fireworks were thrown into the house of a Jewish family, which had been subjected to repeated anti-Semitic incidents by a group of unknown youth in the town of Hippolytushoef. The family had faced years of threats and harassment, being cursed, and having swastikas scratched in the family’s car. Numerous complaints were made to police, but the offenders were not identified. In 2014 a group of youth were fined and carried out community service for threatening and using profane language toward the family.

In a second case, on August 31, an unknown passenger of a party bus fired shots that smashed a window displaying a star of David. No one was injured. The inhabitant reported the incident to CIDI, then contacted police and the organizer of the party bus, but neither was able to track down the offender. The organizer apologized to the inhabitant and offered to pay for the damaged window.

A Jewish man, identified only as Joram, told local newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* that a group of approximately 50 men pushed, shoved, and verbally accused him with anti-Semitic insults in The Hague on May 5, the country’s national holiday of liberation from the Nazis. Joram stated he had asked the men to stop singing a song about gassing Jews. The men, wearing Feyenoord soccer club jerseys, then began pushing him. Joram told *Algemeen Dagblad* that he believed the men targeted him because he was wearing an Ajax cap, Feyenoord’s rival team, which is widely associated with Jews. He later told CIDI he did not believe the incident had anything to do with the soccer teams. After consulting CIDI, he reported the incident to police.

In April pro-Israel activist Michael Jacobs was involved in a physical altercation with a crowd of men near an anti-Israel rally in Amsterdam. *The Times of Israel* stated that 20 pro-Palestinian protesters confronted Jacobs by pushing and shoving him and shouting “Jew” and “Zionist” at him at the Dam Square while he was wearing an Israeli flag around his shoulders. In a separate incident in March, Jacobs filmed himself with a body camera standing alone at the Dam Square. An anti-Israel protester called two police officers who told Jacobs he was disturbing public order. According to the article, Jacobs had been arrested several times for ignoring police orders, which aim to uphold public order by keeping demonstrators apart, while demonstrating in favor of Israel at the Dam Square, “at times amid violence by the anti-Israel crowd and anti-Semitic hate speech.”

According to CIDI, precautionary measures, such as security personnel and cameras, appeared to be effective in preventing physical attacks. CIDI’s anti-Semitism researcher stated perpetrators came from different parts of society, including the far left and right, soccer fans, and segments of the Muslim population.

CIDI stated the large number of anti-Semitic incidents demonstrated that Jews were disproportionately targeted for discrimination, given the small number of Jews in the country. CIDI also said that persons who were recognizable as Jewish because of dress or outward appearance, for instance wearing a yarmulke, were sometimes targets of confrontations.

A Pew Research Center survey released in October found 28 percent of residents held an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, compared with 35 percent in 2016. The same survey found that 5 percent of persons had an unfavorable opinion of Jews.

In May the European Commission carried out a study in each EU member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 50 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the Netherlands, while 47 percent said it was rare; 91 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 97 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, and 96 percent said they would be with an atheist, 97 percent with a Jew, 96 percent with a Buddhist, and 94 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 93 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 88 percent if atheist, 91 percent if Jewish, 87 percent

if Buddhist, and 79 percent if Muslim. The poll did not attempt to break out respondents by religion.

In November the Anti-Defamation League released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country's residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were "probably true" or "probably false." The proportion agreeing that various statements were "probably true" was: 43 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the Netherlands; 20 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 31 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

In January the European Commission published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews conducted in December 2018 in each EU member state. According to the survey, 65 percent of respondents believed anti-Semitism as a problem in the Netherlands, and 55 percent believed that it had increased over the previous five years. The percentages who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 56 percent; on the internet, 66 percent; graffiti or vandalism, 65 percent; expressions of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 61 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 51 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 50 percent; in schools and universities, 37 percent; in political life, 29 percent; and in the media, 40 percent.

An April poll among 800 readers of the *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper, including 163 Jewish respondents, found that anti-Semitism was on the rise. Of the Jewish respondents, 70 percent held that opinion, even if they did not experience it themselves, while 84 percent of the Jewish respondents were worried about increased anti-Semitism.

In May CJO Chairman Verdoner stated that, although there was no organized violence against Jews in the country, people tended to normalize anti-Semitism as they would stealing a bicycle. He called for a coalition of people and organizations, including representatives of various religions, schools, and online moderators, to stand up against anti-Semitism, "because if only Jews take offense, it is too late." Jacques Grishaver, president of the Netherlands Auschwitz Committee, stated one could "hardly walk around Amsterdam with a kippah on." Conversely, Ruben Vis, secretary general of the Netherlands Jewish Congregation, dismissed that as "nonsense," stating that he went everywhere wearing his kippah.

The government-sponsored, editorially independent Registration Center for Discrimination on the Internet (MiND Nederland) registered 67 inflammatory statements made against Muslims on the internet in 2018, compared with 101 in 2017. According to MiND Nederland, the decrease was likely due to the low incidence of reporting rather than to an actual drop in prevalence. MiND Nederland also reported 145 instances of anti-Semitic rhetoric on the internet in 2018, 25 percent of all registered instances of discrimination, compared with 236 in 2017. It had no clear explanation for the decrease but cited a sharp decrease of reported discriminatory expressions on social media following government agreements with companies such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter to remove such statements.

CIDI described numerous instances of anti-Semitic rhetoric and other content on the internet. For example, Dutch preacher David Sorensen posted multiple anti-Semitic comments on social media, such as “Jews complain that they were persecuted by Hitler, but they are doing exactly the same to millions of Palestinians.” He also disseminated conspiracy theories about Jews, including one that the founding of Israel was a plot between Freemasons and the Rothschilds.

In January supporters of the Rotterdam-based Feyenoord soccer club chanted anti-Semitic slogans during a soccer match against Ajax, including, “My father was with the commandos, my mother with the SS, and together they burn Jews because Jews burn best.” Police intervened and arrested eight supporters, who were each fined 500 euros (\$560). A week earlier, fans in Leeuwarden chanted anti-Semitic slogans ahead of a match between Heerenveen and AZ Alkmaar. In February supporters of ADO Den Haag sprayed anti-Semitic texts around Amsterdam ahead of a match against Ajax. Following public and political outcry, CIDI filed police complaints related to anti-Semitic actions during the January and February games, and investigations continued at year’s end.

On July 16, the prosecutor’s office in The Hague announced that it would prosecute an imam who stated those who are not Muslim, or who are Sunni, are pigs. The imam did not deny making the statement but claimed it was allowed on the grounds of religious freedom.

In June CIDI revealed that a rapper calling herself “Anne Frank” had a long history of anti-Semitic statements, such as “if Taylor Swift were Jewish, I would have gassed her personally.” She also denied that Anne Frank had been killed by the Nazis. Following a public outcry, the rapper dropped the name and apologized, stating that she meant no harm.

On September 26, national broadcasting organization BNNVARA apologized for a nighttime radio program in which the moderator had allowed a caller to express numerous anti-Semitic statements for eight minutes. CIDI director Hanna Luden expressed shock, saying, “Such a long phone call in which virtually every anti-Semitic prejudice was raised – it’s amazing that the moderator did not intervene.” CIDI received dozens of angry phone calls and messages and filed a complaint with police.

According to academic researcher on anti-Muslim sentiment Ineke van der Valk’s book *Mikpunt Moskee* (Target Mosque), Islam was growing in the country while other religions were increasingly restricted to the private domain due to secularization. At the same time, she wrote, there was a strong negative reaction to Islam and its increasing visibility in public life. According to van der Valk, Muslims were not united on how to deal with this situation. They declined to join forces with other groups facing discrimination, such as Jewish and LGBTI communities, as they rejected acknowledgement of such discrimination within their own ranks. In the book, Van der Valk observed that many Muslims perceived a hostile social climate and lack of acceptance and experienced exclusion and discrimination. She stated media and politics played important roles in the negative representation of Muslims and Islam. According to the book, construction of some new mosques faced delays due to protests despite compliance with all procedures and legal regulations, although most building plans were carried out.

Van der Valk also cited 26 acts of aggression, ranging from arson to threats, against mosques in 2018, adding that many incidents remained unreported. The General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and NCTV stated in their annual reports that the threat against mosques came from both those with jihadist and extreme right ideologies. They reported an increase of anti-Islamic activity by the extreme right online, particularly in the use of more aggressive language. The AIVD and NCTV reports estimated the likelihood of violence by known extremist groups to be low but cited the risks posed by lone actors.

The Islamophobia Report in the Netherlands: National Report 2018, part of the *European Islamophobia Report*, stated that 95 percent of Muslims it surveyed said they had experienced at least one anti-Muslim incident in the previous five years.

Societal research released in January by SCP found that 48 percent of residents had a negative view of Muslims, while 21 percent supported closing all mosques.

The Third Monitor on Muslim Discrimination, a multiyear research project by the University of Amsterdam, cited an increase of protests near mosques by various groups they consider to be extremist, such as the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West (PEGIDA), Identitarian Resistance, National People's Union, Right Resistance, and Voorpost, as well as local groups. Protests varied from pork barbeques near mosques to posting anti-Islamic banners, blocking fences, showing anti-Islam videos, and placing crosses on construction sites of mosques. For example, during Ramadan in May, PEDIGA planned a series of pork barbeque protests in several cities, but most were prohibited beforehand because local authorities feared public disturbances. On May 26, authorities allowed PEDIGA to demonstrate in Eindhoven, but they were attacked by counterdemonstrators. Riot police had difficulty controlling the situation. The mayor of Eindhoven prohibited a renewed demonstration by PEDIGA a week later for fear of public disturbances.

On January 4, the Amsterdam District Court convicted three men for offending and inciting discrimination against homosexuals and fined them 500 euros (\$560) each for distributing pamphlets in mailboxes in predominantly migrant neighborhoods in Amsterdam with quotations from the Bible, Torah, and Quran condemning homosexuality.

On October 14, the Amsterdam District Court convicted an Afghan man, Jawed Santani, of attempted murder with terrorist intent and sentenced him to 26 years and 8 months in prison and to pay 2.6 million euros (\$2.9 million) in material and immaterial damages for stabbing two U.S. citizens at Amsterdam Central Station in 2018. The suspect told police he believed the Dutch had insulted the Prophet Muhammad, Islam, and the Quran.

Police also arrested Pakistani Junaid I. in August 2018 at The Hague Central Train Station. Junaid had traveled to The Hague with plans to attack Geert Wilders, reportedly because of Wilder's plans, later cancelled, to hold a Muhammad cartoon competition. On November 18, the district court of The Hague found the suspect guilty of planning a terrorist attack and sentenced him to 10 years in prison. Wilders resumed the cartoon contest on December 28. The next day he announced an anonymous winner, who would receive the \$10,000 prize, and posted the winning image to his Twitter feed.

In April a man placed several garbage bags at the front door of the Esdoornlaan mosque in Leeuwarden and set them on fire. On October 3, the District Court in

Leeuwarden convicted the man of arson, sentencing him to 36 months in prison and ordering him to pay damages to the mosque. Following the incident, the mosque took additional security measures.

On May 1, The Hague District Court convicted a man for offending Jews and sentenced him to 120 hours of community service and a visit to Westerbork Camp for chanting, “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas,” during a soccer game in 2017.

The Security Pact Against Discrimination – a movement established by Muslim, Jewish, and Christian organizations to combat anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and other forms of discrimination – organized events to promote mutual solidarity. The group’s membership included the Council of Churches, the representative body of main Christian churches in the country, and several NGOs, including the Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation, the Humanist Alliance, the Liberal Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam, the National Council of Moroccans, and the Platform to Stop Racism and Exclusion. The group’s events included a gathering following the mosque attacks in New Zealand in March and another meeting after the synagogue attack in Halle in October.

For Holocaust Remembrance Day, artist Daan Roosegaarde installed light-up stones across 150 municipalities. The display was installed in museums and public spaces, including the Groningen synagogue in the north.

In December 2018 SCP published a major study of Christians living in the country. The report found the percentage of residents who considered themselves Christian dropped to 31 percent in 2018 from 43 percent in 2002. Three-quarters of respondents reported that their view of organized churches did not align with their view of the meaning of life. SCP found that young church members are strong believers. According to the report, the approximately one million Christian immigrants in the country were often surprised and disappointed about the secular nature of Dutch society.

CIDI continued to conduct programs to counter prejudice against Jews and other minorities in schools, working with a network of teachers to improve education on the Holocaust. CIDI invited 25 teachers for an annual visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem for a seminar on how to teach students about the Holocaust. More than 250 teachers had participated in the program since its inception. Upon their return, they become members of the World War II Education Platform, an organization providing information and lectures about World War II. CIDI regularly organized symposia and lectures for this platform.

It also continued to lead anti-Semitism workshops for police and prosecutors at the police academy.

There were multiple initiatives to promote interfaith dialogue among Jews, Muslims, and Christians, initiated by NGOs such as OJCM and Belief in Living Together. For example, the Liberal Jewish Community of Amsterdam continued its youth outreach project entitled “Get to Know Your Neighbors,” which invited students into a synagogue to explain Jewish practices. The Mo&Moos (Mohammed and Moshe) program of the Amsterdam-based Salaam-Shalom NGO and Platform for Islamic Organizations in Rijnmond again brought together young Muslim and Jewish professionals. NGO INS Platform maintained a website where citizens could meet “ordinary” Muslims. In Amstelveen, Jewish and Muslim groups continued to meet with local authorities and political parties to discuss issues of safety, religion, education, and discrimination involving Jews and Muslims.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In conversations with officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Justice and Security, of Social Affairs and Employment, and of Education, Culture, and Science, local governments, and with parliamentarians, staff from the U.S. embassy and consulate general in Amsterdam emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and discussed measures to safeguard religious freedom, ritual slaughter, and male circumcision.

The embassy and consulate general highlighted the need for religious tolerance and interfaith understanding and discussed issues of religious integration and violent extremism in outreach to youth, academics, and religious leaders from various backgrounds, including Muslims, Jews, Christians, Baha’i, and Falun Gong adherents, as well as community organizations such as CJO, CIDI, OJCM, the Transatlantic Christian Council, and the Anne Frank Foundation. Embassy representatives met with NGOs such as Amnesty International to discuss religious freedom issues and related factors, such as equal treatment from law enforcement and housing authorities. Embassy officials also met with members of the Iranian community in the country to discuss freedom of religion issues in asylum centers.

In January the Ambassador participated, on behalf of the United States as a member of the IHRA, in the annual Holocaust remembrance event, hosted by the Dutch Auschwitz Committee, in Amsterdam to show solidarity for the Jewish community and religious tolerance. In April the Ambassador toured the synagogue

of the Liberal Jewish Community (LJG) of The Hague and discussed the opportunities and challenges of the congregation regarding expression of faith. In September a senior embassy representative discussed the history and role of the Jewish community in the country, as well as the importance of protection of the community against anti-Semitism, with CJO chairman Verdoner. The same representative then met with the rabbis and the chairman of the LJG of Amsterdam to discuss the importance of religious freedom and dialogue between the Jewish community and rest of society, as well as the promotion of Holocaust remembrance.

In an April interview with public broadcasting association Evangelische Omroep for a documentary on the U.S.-Dutch relationship, the Ambassador spoke about the history of religious tolerance in the United States and the relationship between the Christian communities of the United States and the Netherlands. The documentary was scheduled to be broadcast in the country in 2020.

In May the Ambassador attended the National Iftar Dinner in The Hague, also attended by the mayor of The Hague and more than 200 government officials, politicians, business leaders, and members of NGOs. The Ambassador discussed the importance of shared compassion, respect, and support for people of all faiths and backgrounds.

In October embassy officials visited the Al Hijra Islamic Center in Leiden and joined the mayor of Leiden and community leaders in a roundtable to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing the Muslim community regarding religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and civic integration.

In September the embassy sponsored the participation of a representative of the Jewish community in a program in the United States focused on advancing interfaith relations.

On November 10, a senior embassy representative attended the Kristallnacht commemoration event hosted by CJO at the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. During the event, the representative engaged with other attendees on the importance of promoting religious freedom and tolerance in a pluralistic society.

Officials from the U.S. Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom attended the Istanbul Process in The Hague, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on November 18-19. A senior Department of State official spoke at a session attended by numerous international and local delegations and advocacy

groups on implementing measures to combat intolerance based on religion or belief. During the visit, the same official met with Dutch religious leaders and religious freedom advocates to discuss ways to enhance religious freedom in the country.