

# SWITZERLAND 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of faith and conscience, and, along with the penal code, prohibits discrimination against any religion or religious adherents. The constitution delegates regulation of the relationship between government and religious groups to the 26 cantons. In a referendum, Glarus Canton rejected a ban on face coverings in public; the Cantonal Parliament of St. Gallen enacted a similar ban, not yet in force at year's end, and Ticino Canton enforced its existing ban. The national government decided against regulating the display of religious symbols in government buildings or by civil servants. The Basel-Landschaft cantonal government sustained a Muslim couple's complaint against a school that penalized one of their two sons after the boys allegedly refused to shake hands with their female teacher in 2015. A government report concluded protecting Jewish institutions was of national importance and established a working group to assess potential vulnerabilities in the security of religious groups. A Sion court fined a lower house parliamentarian after he publicly condoned the killing of a Muslim in 2015. The government organized a conference to discuss and raise awareness of the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment in society, media, and politics.

Muslim representatives reported an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, attributing it to the increasing politicization of Islam and negative media reporting. They stated many Muslims felt socially excluded and that Muslim women wearing headscarves experienced job and housing discrimination. Jewish representatives reported anti-Semitic incidents, including on social media. There were three reports of physical assaults against Jews in 2016, the most recent year for which data were available. Ahmadis reported discrimination by other Muslims. Several surveys and studies reported bias against Muslims and, in one survey, against Jews. In October vandals desecrated several Muslim gravesites at a recently opened cemetery in Lausanne, and city authorities were prosecuting them. The case was continuing at year's end.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government, focusing on federal government-supported projects aimed at promoting religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy officials met with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society officials, and religious leaders from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities as well as representatives of other religious minorities,

eliciting their views on the extent of religious discrimination. The embassy hosted an iftar, which included discussions of religious tolerance and religious diversity.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.2 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the Federal Statistics Office, as of 2015, the latest year for which figures are available, 37.3 percent of the population (49.7 percent of those who cited a religious affiliation) is Roman Catholic, 24.9 percent (33.3 percent) Reformed Evangelical, 5.8 percent (7.8 percent) other Christian groups, 5.1 percent (6.7 percent) Muslim, and 0.2 percent Jewish. Persons identifying with no religious group constitute 23.9 percent, and the religious affiliation of 1.3 percent of the population is unknown. According to the Federal Statistics Office, of the population over the age of 15 belonging to other Christian groups, 2.3 percent is Orthodox Christian or Old-Oriental Christian, 2.3 percent is other Protestant, including evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic Christian, and the remaining 1.3 percent includes Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Christian Catholics (also known as Old Catholics). Religious groups together constituting 1.3 percent of the population include Buddhists, Hindus, Bahais, and Sikhs.

Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are of foreign origin, with over 30 countries represented. Media reports state most come from countries of the former Yugoslavia, while others come from Albania, Turkey, North Africa, and Somalia. According to a 2017 Bertelsmann Foundation report, 51 percent of the Muslim community is Sunni; the remainder includes 6 percent Alevis, 5 percent Shia, 7 percent others, including Ahmadis, and 19 percent who do not identify with a particular Islamic group. Muslim populations are largest in the cities of Zurich, Basel, Geneva, Lausanne, Winterthur, Bern, and St. Gallen. Approximately 50 percent of Jewish households are located in Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Lausanne, and Lugano.

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

### **Legal Framework**

In its preamble, the constitution states it is adopted in the name of "Almighty God." It guarantees freedom of faith and conscience, states each person has the right to choose his or her religion and to profess it alone or with others, and prohibits religious discrimination. It states the confederation and cantons may,

within the scope of their powers, act to preserve peace between members of different religious communities.

The federal penal code prohibits any form of “debasement,” which is not specifically defined, or discrimination against any religion or religious adherents. Inciting hatred or discrimination, including by electronic means and on the basis of religion, is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment or a fine. The law also penalizes anyone who refuses to provide a service because of someone’s religion, organizes, promotes, or participates in propaganda aimed at degrading and defaming adherents of a religion, or “denies, justifies, or plays down genocide or other crimes against humanity.”

The constitution delegates regulation of relations between the government and religious groups to the 26 cantons. The cantons offer legal recognition as public entities to religious communities that fulfill a number of prerequisites and whose applications for recognition are approved in a popular referendum. The necessary prerequisites include a statement acknowledging the right of religious freedom; the democratic organization of the religious community; respect for the cantonal and federal constitutions and rule of law; and financial transparency.

The Cantons of Basel, Zurich, and Vaud also offer religious communities legal recognition as private entities. This gives them the right to teach their religions in public schools. Procedures for obtaining private legal recognition vary; for example, in Basel the approval of the Canton’s Grand Council (the cantonal legislature) is required.

There is no law requiring the registration of a religious group in the cantonal commercial registry. Religious foundations, characterized as institutions with a religious purpose that receive financial donations and maintain connections to a religious community, must register in the commercial registry. To register, the foundation must submit an official letter of application to the respective authorities and include the organization’s name, purpose, board members, and head office location as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization’s statutes.

The granting of tax-exempt status to a religious group varies from canton to canton. Most cantons automatically grant tax-exempt status to those religious communities that receive cantonal financial support, while all other religious communities must generally establish they are organized as nonprofit associations and submit an application for tax-exempt status to the cantonal government.

All of the cantons, with the exception of Geneva, Neuchatel, Ticino, and Vaud, financially support at least one of four religious communities that the cantons have recognized as public entities – Roman Catholic, Christian Catholic, Reformed Evangelical, or Jewish – with funds collected through a mandatory church tax for registered church members and, in some cantons, businesses. Only religious groups recognized as public entities are eligible to receive funds collected through the church tax, and no canton has recognized any other religious groups as public entities. The church tax is voluntary in the Cantons of Ticino, Neuchatel, and Geneva, while in all others an individual who chooses not to pay the church tax may have to formally leave the religious institution. The Canton of Vaud is the only canton that does not collect a church tax; however, the Reformed Evangelical and Roman Catholic denominations are subsidized directly through the cantonal budget.

The constitution prohibits the construction of minarets. The prohibition does not apply to the four existing mosques with minarets established before the constitution was amended to include the ban. New mosques may be built without minarets.

The constitution sets education policy at the cantonal level, but municipal school authorities have some discretion in implementing cantonal guidelines. Most public cantonal schools offer religious education, with the exception of schools in Geneva and Neuchatel. Public schools normally offer classes in Catholic and/or Protestant doctrines, with the precise details varying from canton to canton and sometimes from school to school; a few schools provide instruction on other religions. The municipality of Ebikon, in the Canton of Lucerne, offers religious classes in Islamic doctrine, as does the municipality of Kreuzlingen, in the Canton of Thurgau. In some cantons, religious classes are voluntary, while in others, such as in Zurich and Fribourg, they form part of the mandatory curriculum at the secondary school level; however, schools routinely grant waivers for children whose parents request them. Children from minority religious groups may attend classes of their own faith during the religious class period. Minority religious groups must organize and finance these classes and hold them outside of the public schools. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools at their expense or homeschool their children.

Most cantons complement traditional classes in Christian doctrines with more general classes about religion and culture. There are no national guidelines for

waivers on religious grounds from religion classes not covering doctrine, and practices vary.

A federal animal welfare law prohibits ritual slaughter of animals without prior anesthetization, effectively banning kosher and halal slaughter practices. Importation of traditionally slaughtered kosher and halal meat is legal, and such products are available.

Religious groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize, but foreign missionaries from countries not members of the EU or the European Free Trade Association must obtain a religious worker visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof the foreigner does not displace a citizen from a job; that he/she has completed formal theological training; and that he/she will be financially supported by the host organization. Nonrecognized religious groups must also demonstrate to cantonal governments that the number of their foreign religious workers is not out of proportion to the size of the community when compared to the relative number of religious workers of cantonally-recognized religious communities.

Foreign missionaries must also have sufficient knowledge of, respect for, and understanding of national customs and culture; be conversant in at least one of the three main national languages; and hold a degree in theology. The law requires immigrant clerics with insufficient language skills and knowledge of local culture and customs, regardless of religious affiliation, to attend mandatory language courses, as well as related specialist training, to facilitate their integration into society. In some instances, the cantons may approve an applicant lacking this proficiency by devising an “integration agreement” that contains certain goals the applicant must try to meet. The host organization must also “recognize the country’s legal norms” and pledge it will not tolerate abuse of the law by its members. If an applicant is unable to meet these requirements, the government may deny the residency and work permits.

The law also allows the government to refuse residency and work permits if a background check reveals an individual has ties to religious groups deemed “radicalized” or has engaged in “hate preaching,” defined as publicly inciting hatred against a religious group, disseminating ideologies intended to defame members of a religious group, organizing defamatory propaganda campaigns, engaging in public discrimination, denying or trivializing genocide and other crimes against humanity, or refusing to provide service based on religion. The law authorizes immigration authorities to refuse residency permits to clerics the

government considers “fundamentalists” if authorities deem internal security or public order is at risk.

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

### **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph:* The Canton of Glarus voted against a ban on face coverings, while the Canton of St. Gallen enacted such a ban (though it had not entered into force by year’s end), and Ticino enforced its existing one. The Federal Council (cabinet and collective head of government) declined to issue regulations on the display of religious symbols in public buildings or by public officials. Muslims continued to call for more Islamic burial grounds; Muslims were able to bury their dead according to Islamic rites in 10 of 26 cantons. A Jewish group reported increasingly strict school policies restricted the wearing of religious garb, such as skullcaps, by Jewish as well as Muslim students. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld a school requirement in Basel that Muslim parents send their children to mixed-gender school swimming lessons. Basel’s government sustained a complaint by Muslim parents of two sons, one of whom had been punished at school for allegedly refusing to shake his female teacher’s hand. Following a government report in October calling the protection of Jewish institutions of national importance, the government established a working group to address security vulnerabilities of religious groups.

In May the Canton of Glarus rejected a referendum on proposed legislation submitted by a politician from the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) that would have banned burqas, *niqabs*, and other face coverings in public. The proposal was based on a Ticino Canton law banning the public wearing of facial coverings for religious reasons or for purposes aimed at maintaining anonymity while perpetrating violent acts in public. Violators were subject to fines of up to 10,000 Swiss francs (CHF) (\$10,300).

In January the city of Lugano in Ticino fined a citizen, a Muslim woman, 250 CHF (\$260) for wearing a *niqab* in violation of the Canton of Ticino’s face covering ban, shortly after the ban’s implementation in July 2016. The woman faced another possible fine by the city of Locarno, also in Ticino, for wearing a *niqab* in that city on the first day of the ban’s implementation. Locarno had not fined the woman by year’s end.

In November the Cantonal Parliament of St. Gallen passed new legislation penalizing the wearing of facial concealments in public if the concealment posed

“a threat to public security or religious and/or societal peace.” The law, which stated threats would be determined on a case-by-case basis and did not specify penalties for violators, had not come into effect by year’s end. While the legislation did not specifically mention the burqa, political discussions about the law predominantly focused on Islamic garb, including the burqa and *niqab*, with the SVP calling the decision “a stance against extremism.”

In December the Cantonal Parliament of Valais declared invalid a people’s initiative (a type of referendum) by the SVP that called for a ban on the wearing of headscarves in schools. The Valais branch of the SVP appealed the decision, with the case pending at the Federal Court at year’s end.

In June the Federal Council decided against introducing federal rules and regulations regarding the public display of religious symbols in government buildings or the wearing of religious symbols by public officials. The council said it based its decision, which responded to a request by parliament’s lower house to examine the legal framework for displaying and wearing religious symbols, on a government-commissioned study by the Swiss Center for Human Rights. The center concluded that court cases over religious symbols were rare and that large cantonal differences in the traditions and use of religious symbols would make it difficult to devise national regulations.

Muslims were able to bury their dead according to Islamic rites in 10 out of 26 cantons. In 2016, the municipalities of Baden in the Canton of Aargau, Glarus North in the Canton of Glarus, and Lausanne in the Canton of Vaud issued permits for establishing Islamic burial grounds in their cemeteries. Muslim representatives continued to call for more Islamic burial grounds in municipalities to reduce the financial costs of repatriating deceased family members to their country of origin. The representatives added that second-generation migrant Muslims increasingly wanted to be buried in the country.

In an article published in a government magazine in June, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) stated increasingly strict school policies about religious attire and religious observances resulted in education authorities more frequently denying Jewish children school dispensations for religious reasons. According to SIG, while stricter school policies were mainly directed at Muslim students, they also had the potential to increasingly restrict Jewish students’ religious expression, such as wearing the Jewish skullcap (*kippah*). Some members of the Muslim community also stated they believed the schools’ restrictions were primarily aimed at Muslim students.

In January the ECHR upheld a policy in the Canton of Basel-Stadt requiring Muslim parents to send their two daughters to mixed-gender school swimming lessons. The parents had been fined 1,400 CHF (\$1,450) for refusing to allow their daughters to participate in the mandatory lessons, citing their religious beliefs. The parents appealed to the ECHR after losing an appeal in Federal Court in 2012. The ECHR judges found freedom of religion had been “interfered with” but that the move was legitimized by the aim of “social integration” and the fine was appropriate.

In May the government of the Canton of Basel-Landschaft ruled in favor of a Muslim couple’s complaint against the school of their two teenage sons for ordering one of the boys (the other reportedly withdrew from the school) to perform 10 hours of social work as punishment in 2016, after both sons purportedly refused in 2015 to shake hands with their female teacher for religious reasons. The parents successfully argued the school could not name a specific instance in which the son’s teacher had actually insisted that he shake hands with her. The boys’ alleged refusal to shake their teacher’s hand resulted in Basel migration authorities suspending the citizenship application of the Muslim family in April 2016. According to press reports, the citizenship application remained suspended. Also in reaction to this incident, the Basel education directorate informed local schools in 2016 they could fine parents up to 5,000 CHF (\$5,150) if their children repeatedly refused to adhere to a school’s code of conduct, which could include an obligation to shake hands with teachers. The case generated widespread local and international media attention.

A government report released in October concluded the protection of Jewish institutions was an “issue of national importance,” following repeated calls by Jewish representatives to increase government efforts to safeguard the community’s security. The report reversed the conclusion of a previous report the interior ministry had issued in November 2016 stating that, while the government was required to protect Jews at risk, it had no responsibility to protect Jewish institutions. According to the October report, the government established an interdepartmental working group to assess potential security gaps in the protection of religious groups, including the Jewish and Muslim communities, and prepare a protection plan. The government had not issued the protection plan by year’s end. The Federal Office for Justice also established a coordination office for religious issues during the year to improve the government’s handling of religious matters.



In September the Parliament of the Canton of Basel cast a nonbinding vote to pay a maximum contribution of 500,000 CHF (\$532,000) per year for the security of the local Jewish community.

In March the authorities of Bern-Mittelland in Bern Canton rejected a complaint by the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland (ICCS), a group comprised of approximately 40 active members, after the city of Bern denied a 2016 application by the ICCS to host a public event aimed at promoting peace and the denunciation of ISIS. Bern-Mittelland officials justified the city of Bern's application denial by stating security forces would not have been able to guarantee the safety of the demonstrators because of the country's "increased threat level" and the "radical Islamic ideology" espoused by the ICCS. The ICCS appealed the Bern-Mittelland rejection of their complaint, but local government authorities rejected the initial appeal in October, and the Bern-Mittelland Administrative Court denied a second appeal in December.

In September the Federal Commission Against Racism, a committee in the Federal Department of Home Affairs tasked with combating discrimination, organized a conference to raise awareness and discuss the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment in society, media, and politics. In his opening speech, Federal Councilor and Minister for Home Affairs Alain Berset stressed the importance of not equating Islam with extremism.

In August the district court of Sion in the Canton of Valais sentenced lower house SVP parliamentarian Jean-Luc Addor to a suspended fine of 18,000 CHF (\$18,500) and an additional unsuspended fine of 3,000 CHF (\$3,100) for breaching the antiracism law after the man publicly condoned the killing of a Muslim in a St. Gallen mosque in 2015 with a tweet that read, "We want more!"

During a party meeting in October, the SVP proposed a new list of measures for combating religious extremism, including the surveillance of imams and the prohibition of overseas financial support of Muslim communities. The President of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Switzerland (FIDS), Montassar BenMrad, and the Association of Islamic Organizations of Zurich called the proposed measures anti-Muslim. The youth branch of the Social Democratic Party stated the SVP's proposed measures would lead to social divisions and the marginalization of Muslims. Two weeks after the SVP proposed the measures, Social Democratic Party President Christian Levrat said that parties such as the SVP and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) were promoting anti-Muslim sentiment with their rhetoric, although Levrat did not refer specifically to

the SVP measures. In December the CVP also presented a new list of proposals pertaining predominantly to Muslims, which included calls for a burqa ban and other prohibitions against “discriminating” attire, such as wearing headscarves at school.

In May a Zurich court convicted a man of defamation after he “liked” Facebook posts that attacked the head of an animal rights group – describing him as racist, anti-Semitic, and fascist and his organization as neo-Nazi.

The government continued to grant visas primarily to religious workers who intended to replace individuals serving in similar functions in the same religious community. Turkish nationals applying for short- and long-term religious worker visas needed to show they were associated with the Turkish Central Authority for Religious Affairs.

Pursuant to past court decisions, the government continued not to issue missionaries of certain denominations, such as Mormons, religious visas because they did not possess a theology degree. Mormon missionaries from Schengen Area countries could work, however, because they did not require visas to enter the country.

As of November the Federal Service for Combating Racism, which was responsible for matters related to religious discrimination, had provided 100,000 CHF (\$103,000) to fund nine projects focusing on religious freedom, including combating religious discrimination and prejudice against Muslims and Jews. One project, titled Swiss Muslim Stories, entailed producing and showing short films about Muslims in the country in a campaign to counter anti-Muslim sentiment and extremism.

Although not a requirement, schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum, and to participate in the Holocaust Day of Remembrance on January 27. Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr as well as the 2017 Chair of the Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Benno Battig, and the head of the Foreign Ministry’s Historical Services, Francois Wisard, attended an official Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at the Yehudi Menuhin Forum in Bern.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and chaired the alliance during the year. During its chairmanship, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs supported several Holocaust education projects, including the publication of a collection of testimonials by Holocaust

survivors and mobile exhibitions on the last Swiss Holocaust survivors. In November the government launched a new initiative for introducing Holocaust study topics at the University of Teacher Education in Lausanne beginning in 2018.

The country is a signatory to the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets. The government reported Holocaust-era restitution was no longer a significant issue. Both the government and SIG stated there were no litigation or restitution claims regarding real or immovable property covered by the Terezin Declaration pending before authorities.

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

*Summary paragraph:* The government, NGOs, and media outlets reported several cases of religiously motivated physical assault against Jews in 2016; an increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the German speaking areas; a decrease in the French speaking area; and a significant rise in anti-Semitic speech on social media. A report by a government-NGO group cited fewer anti-Muslim incidents in 2016, the last year for which data were available, and said most incidents were verbal. Muslim representatives reported an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, including continuing suspicion, discrimination, and social exclusion from their communities, which they attributed to increasing politicization of Islam and negative media reports. Ahmadi Muslims said other Muslim groups refused to recognize Ahmadis as Muslims and continued to exclude them from opportunities to engage with the government. Several surveys and studies reported social bias against Muslims and, in one survey, Jews. A Green Party parliamentarian resigned after comparing the transport of pigs for slaughter to the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz. Vandals desecrated Islamic gravesites in Lausanne and city authorities initiated criminal proceedings against them. NGOs and religious groups organized interfaith events and programs to promote tolerance. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The *2016 Anti-Semitism Report*, produced jointly by the SIG and the NGO Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, cited 25 anti-Semitic incidents (excluding anti-Semitic hate speech online) in the German-speaking part of the country in 2016, compared with 16 incidents in 2015. The SIG attributed the increase in recorded incidents to a potential improvement in reporting by the public. The report documented two physical assaults against Jews. In 2016, the Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against Anti-Semitism and

Defamation reported 153 anti-Semitic incidents in the French-speaking region, compared with 164 cases in 2015, of which it deemed one “grave” (involving acts against the integrity and wellbeing of a person, including aggression, harassment, or destruction of property), and five “serious” (involving acts such as anti-Semitic letters, insults, or graffiti). The report described an increase in anti-Semitic incidents motivated by the myth of a global Jewish conspiracy controlling the world, as well as a steep rise in anti-Semitic incidents on social media, primarily by right-wing extremist groups.

In April the Consulting Network for Racism Victims, a collaboration between the NGO [humanrights.ch](http://humanrights.ch) and the Federal Commission Against Racism, consisting of a network providing consulting and counseling services related to racism, released its report for 2016. It documented a decrease in anti-Muslim incidents but an increase in discrimination against persons of Arab background. According to the report, anti-Muslim incidents were predominantly verbal and occurred mainly in public spaces, at work, at school, and in neighborhoods. In one incident, a doctor refused to treat a Muslim woman’s children because she did not want to shake hands with him for religious reasons. The doctor reportedly told the woman Muslims had to conform to local customs. In another incident, a woman told a Muslim woman waiting at the bus stop, “Go home, we don’t want any headscarves here!”

Muslim representatives, such as FIDS President BenMrad, said the increasing politicization of Islam by right-wing political parties and polarizing media narratives about Muslims led to growing anti-Muslim sentiment. Other Muslim representatives, including Nida-Errahmen Ajmi, from the Frislam Muslim youth association in Fribourg, and Islamic scholar Rifa’at Lenzin, stated Muslims perceived society to regard them with constant suspicion felt pressured to defend Islam and their religious practices, which led to increased social isolation. Muslims also reported female Muslims wearing headscarves were discriminated against in the labor and housing markets but did not cite any examples.

In August the innkeeper of an apartment hotel in the Canton of Graubunden posted a sign reading: “To our Jewish guests – women, men, and children: Please take a shower before you go swimming ... If you break the rules, I’m forced to close the swimming pool for you.” The innkeeper posted a similar notice regarding access times for a dedicated freezer the hotel provided for strict kosher guests to use. The innkeeper later removed the signs and publicly apologized for the incident. While the Federal Commission Against Racism called the signs “apparently discriminatory,” SIG stated it did not perceive the incident as anti-Semitic.

In September Green Party parliamentarian Jonas Fricker resigned from office after being criticized for comparing the transport of pigs with the mass deportation of Jews to Auschwitz during a debate on a fair food initiative. “The last time I saw a documentary on the transport of pigs, it conjured up images of the mass deportations to Auschwitz from the movie *Schindler’s List*,” he said, adding, “The people who were brought there had a small chance of surviving. The pigs are faced with certain death.” Federal Councilor Alain Berset, who presided over the debate, said the Federal Council rejected the comparison in all its forms, while the man’s party colleagues distanced themselves from his comments. The parliamentarian apologized for his “inappropriate comparison” during the debate, and attributed his comments to “naïveté.”

In October the magazine *Swordsmen*, a quarterly German publication described by other press as neo-Nazi, featured a deceased German SS Officer on its cover, which appeared in approximately 20 newsstands run by the supermarket Coop. According to Coop, a distribution error by an external supplier caused the incident. Coop ordered all of its newsstands to remove the magazine.

In December the president of the youth branch of the SVP in the Canton of Neuchâtel, Steve Cao, resigned from office after media made public a tattoo on the man’s lower arm, which cited the Nazi SS slogan, “My honor is my loyalty.” SVP President Albert Rosti called on the youth branch to take a closer look at its members and stated, “right-wing extremism has no place in our party.”

Several studies and surveys throughout the year reported evidence of anti-Muslim sentiment and sometimes anti-Semitism in society. According to a biennial survey on multicultural coexistence the Federal Statistics Office published in April, 17 percent of respondents consistently agreed with negative Muslim stereotypes, while 12 percent consistently agreed with negative Jewish stereotypes. A study by the Bertelsmann Foundation found Muslims generally earned less than non-Muslims, although employment rates were similar, and that 35 percent of Muslims said they had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months. The survey found 98 percent of Muslims (it excluded refugees arriving since 2010) felt connected to the country. It reported that 17 percent of Swiss residents – a low number relative to other European countries surveyed – opposed having Muslim neighbors. A separate survey by the national newspaper *Sonntagsblick* found 80 percent of respondents wished to prohibit Salafism, while 65 percent advocated conducting Friday prayers in mosques in a national language; 61 percent endorsed

a ban on the foreign financing of mosques, and 38 percent said they felt threatened by Islam.

Another study, in which the average respondent's age was 19, found 46 percent of youths regarded Muslims as a "threat to their way of life." A study released in the fall by the Research Institute for the Public Sphere and Society cited a growing focus by local media on radicalization and terrorism when reporting on Islam and Muslims. According to the study, there was a noticeable absence of positive media coverage related to the Muslim community.

Ahmadi Muslims said many Muslim groups refused to recognize them as followers of Islam and excluded them from opportunities to engage in joint dialogue with the government.

According to media and NGO reports, the main groups responsible for engaging in anti-Semitic rhetoric were Geneva Noncompliant, European Action, the Party of Nationally Oriented Swiss (PNOS), and the Swiss Nationalist Party – the French-speaking branch of PNOS. The NGOs Foundation against Racism and anti-Semitism and the Society for Minorities in Switzerland reported an increase in online anti-Semitic rhetoric of neo-Nazi groups. The NGOs also said some groups in the French and Italian-speaking parts of the country succeeded in recruiting new members.

In January a military tribunal launched legal proceedings against six soldiers who took a photograph of themselves performing the Hitler salute next to a swastika drawn in the snow. The case was pending at year's end. In July the cantonal police of Schwyz opened investigations into the appearance of several banners bearing Nazi symbols along a highway. Investigations continued at year's end. In August the Federal Tribunal backed the Cantonal Court of Geneva's sentencing of three men for violating the antidiscrimination law after they performed a gesture resembling the Hitler salute in front of Geneva's Beth-Yaacov Synagogue in 2013. The court sentenced the men to suspended fines.

In December 2016, the state prosecutor of the Canton of St. Gallen rejected, due to a lack of evidence, a complaint filed by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism against Swiss neo-Nazi band Amok and German neo-Nazi bands Stahlgewitter, Confident of Victory, Excess, and Frontalkraft for performing what the NGO perceived to be racist and anti-Semitic songs at what was widely described as a right-wing extremist concert attended by 6,000 people in the Canton of St. Gallen two months earlier.

Jewish groups, such as SIG and the NGO Intercommunity Coordination Against Anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD), reported a rise in anti-Semitic incidents on social media. They did not provide additional details, but CICAD stated right-wing extremists carried out 68 percent of anti-Semitic incidents on social media in 2016.

In October vandals desecrated several Islamic gravesites in the Bois-de-Vaux cemetery in Lausanne, which was established in 2016. The vandals uprooted plants, overturned headstones, and sprayed messages on the burial grounds that called on Muslims to leave the country. City authorities initiated criminal proceedings in October. A few days after the incident, approximately 500 people participated in a pro-Muslim march through the city, carrying banners reading, “Stop Islamophobia!” One participant told the press, “We stand in solidarity with the 30,000 Muslims in this canton.”

Many NGOs and representatives of the religious community coordinated interfaith events to promote tolerance locally and nationwide. The Week of Religions in November featured more than 100 interfaith events nationwide, including exhibitions, music and dance concerts, film screenings, roundtables, panel discussions, and communal dinners. SIG, FIDS, and NGOs continued to support a project to encourage tolerance and address misconceptions between Muslims and Jews. The independent Zurich Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, established in 2016 and run by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives, provided a platform to study the religious histories and cultures of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as to discuss contemporary developments related to the religions, by organizing educational courses, speeches, panel discussions, and excursions.

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

U.S. embassy officials discussed with the government’s Federal Service for Combating Racism Swiss federal government-supported projects for promoting religious freedom and tolerance.

Embassy officials met with religious associations, including FIDS, NGOs, such as humanrights.ch, representatives from civil society, and leaders from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities as well as representatives of other religious minorities, including the Bahai, Alevi Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities, to discuss discrimination against religious groups and availability of religious education for religious minorities.

U.S. embassy staff participated in events promoting religious tolerance, including an iftar, a tour of Bern's House of Religions – a community-funded association working to strengthen religious and cultural dialogue – and a visit to a Sikh temple. U.S. embassy staff spoke about the importance of religious freedom and tolerance at these events. U.S. embassy staff organized an iftar to discuss religious tolerance and diversity with Muslim representatives and persons involved in the integration of religious minorities.