



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report for 2014: Turkey

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in its 2014 annual report on Turkey found that "the overall landscape for democracy and human rights has deteriorated significantly during the past year." [Excerpts are provided below; emphasis added.]

-- **The government limits all religious groups' rights to own and maintain places of worship, train clergy, and offer religious education.** This has been particularly detrimental to the smallest minority communities and their ability to transmit their faith to future generations. Other concerns include the listings of religious affiliation on national identity cards, societal discrimination, anti-Semitism, and persistent religious freedom violations in the Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus.

-- Finally, it should be noted that **the overall landscape for democracy and human rights has deteriorated significantly during the past year**, including serious new restrictions on internet freedom, privacy, and media freedom, with troubling implications for freedom of religion or belief in Turkey.

-- USCIRF also heard views from the religious minority communities that **conditions had worsened** and that the **steps taken were negligible**, as well as concerns that the improvements, which are not codified in law, could be easily revoked, especially in the current political climate.

-- The Turkish government continues to require that only Turkish citizens can be members of the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod. Although the Prime Minister in 2010 approved dual citizenship for 25 Metropolitans, others were denied. The government's role in deciding which individuals may be part of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate represents **interference into their internal affairs**. The government also interfered in the selection process of the Armenian Patriarchate's leadership, and denies religious minority communities the ability to train clergy in Turkey.

-- Since 2011, 340 properties- valued, according to the government, at more than 2.5 billion Turkish Lira - have been returned or compensated for. However, **1,000 applications were denied**, 800 for lack of information and 200 for other reasons. Some communities allege bias, consider the process very slow, and claim that compensation has been insufficient.