

U.S. State Department: Israel is not a tolerant society

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Global Research, November 08, 2009

[Haaretz](#) 6 November 2009

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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Israel dismally fails the requirements of a tolerant pluralistic society, according to a new report from the U.S. State Department.

Despite boasting religious freedom and protection of all holy sites, Israel falls short in tolerance toward minorities, equal treatment of ethnic groups, openness toward various streams within society, and respect for holy and other sites.

The comprehensive report, written by the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, says Israel discriminates against groups including Muslims, Jehova's Witnesses, Reform Jews, Christians, women and Bedouin.

The report says that the 1967 law on the protection of holy places refers to all religious groups in the country, including in Jerusalem, but "the government implements regulations only for Jewish sites. Non-Jewish holy sites do not enjoy legal protection under it because the government does not recognize them as official holy sites."

At the end of 2008, for example, all of the 137 officially recognized holy sites were Jewish. Moreover, Israel issued regulations for the identification, preservation and guarding of Jewish sites only. Many Christian and Muslim sites are said to be neglected, inaccessible or at risk of exploitation by real estate entrepreneurs and local authorities.

The report makes it clear that practices that have become routine in Israel are considered unacceptable in enlightened countries and should be corrected.

Among other examples, the report notes that more than 300,000 immigrants who are not considered Jewish under rabbinical law are not allowed to marry and divorce in Israel or be buried in Jewish cemeteries.

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