

Federal Law No. (9) of 2023
concerning the Regulation of Houses of Worship for Non-Muslims

We, Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates;

- Upon reviewing the Constitution;
- Federal Law No. (1) of 1972 concerning the Competences of Ministries and Powers of Ministers, as amended;
- Federal Decree by Law No. (2) of 2015 on Combating Hatred and Discrimination, as amended;
- Federal Law No. (14) of 2016 concerning Administrative Violations and Penalties in the Federal Government;
- Federal Decree by Law No. (31) of 2021 Promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law, as amended;
- Upon the proposal of the Minister of Community Development as approved by the Cabinet and the Federal National Council, and as ratified by the Federal Supreme Council;

Have issued the following Law:

Article (1)

Definitions

In application of the provisions of this Law, the following words and expressions shall have the meanings ascribed thereto unless the context otherwise requires:

State	:	United Arab Emirates.
Ministry	:	Ministry of Community Development.
Minister	:	Minister of Community Development
Local Authority	:	The Local Authority concerned with licensing, supervising and controlling Houses of Worship, within whose jurisdiction the headquarters of the House of Worship falls.
Competent Authority	:	The Ministry or Local Authority, as the case may be.
Relevant Authorities	:	Federal or Local Authorities concerned with the activities carried out by the House of Worship.
Committee	:	The Committee responsible for determining the practices, rituals, and worship of Non-Muslim religions, sects, and beliefs within the State.
Religions, Sects and Beliefs	:	A group of Non-Muslim religions, sects, and beliefs whose practices, worship, and rituals within the State are determined by the Committee.
Houses of Worship	:	Places licensed to perform practices, worship, and conduct religious rituals for religions, sects, and beliefs, including the facilities attached thereto.
Room of Worship	:	Designated and authorised rooms at airports for performing prayers for religions, sects and beliefs in coordination with the Competent Authority.

The Board of Directors	:	The Board responsible for managing the affairs of the House of Worship.
Members	:	The Founding Members and everyone who joins the membership of the House of Worship in accordance with its by-laws.
Supervisor	:	The natural person appointed by the Board to carry out the executive work related to the House of Worship in accordance with by-laws.
Register	:	A database for registering Houses of Worship and rooms.

Article (2)

Law Objectives

This Law aims to achieve the following:

1. Regulate Places and Rooms of Worship in the State.
2. Consolidate the values of tolerance and coexistence.

Article (3)

Scope of Application

Provisions of this Law shall apply to Places and Rooms of Worship in the State, including the Free Zones.

Article (4)

Committee

1. The Committee shall be formed that shall be responsible for determining the practices, Worship, religious rituals, sects, and beliefs within of Non-Muslim in the State.
2. The formation of the Committee, its work system, and its other powers shall be issued by a resolution of the Cabinet based on the Minister proposal.

Article (5)

Register

A register shall be created by the Competent Authority in which the Places and Rooms of Worship that it licences or allocates shall be recorded. The Executive Regulations of this law shall specify the data and information that shall be recorded in this register.

Article (6)

Conditions for Licensing Houses of Worship

Subject to the requirements determined by the Local Authority, the following conditions shall be required for a licence to establish House of Worship:

1. The number of Founding Members of the House of Worship shall not be less than twenty (20) people, provided that each one of them shall fulfil the following conditions:
 - a. The Founding Member shall not be less than forty (40) years of age at the time of submitting the Licence Application. The Competent Authority may make an exception to this condition.
 - b. The Founding Member has full capacity;

- c. The Founding Member shall be of good conduct and of good reputation, and he has not been previously sentenced to imprisonment in a felony or misdemeanour of breaching honour or trust, unless he has been rehabilitated; and
 - d. The Founding Member shall be a follower of the religion, sect, or belief for which the House of Worship is to be licensed, and he shall submit an acknowledgement thereof.
 - e. The Founding Member have resided in the State for a term of no less than (5) five years immediately preceding the submission of the application.
 - f. The Founding Member shall submit a recommendation certificate from the parent House of Worship determined by the Committee.
 - g. The Founding Member shall not be a diplomat.
 - h. The Founding Member shall provide proof of the ability to bear the costs of establishing and operating the House of Worship.
2. The House of Worship to be licensed shall belong to one of the religions, sects, or beliefs whose practices, rituals, and worship in the State the Committee has determined.
 3. All Founding Member shall sign the by-laws of the House of Worship, recording the necessary data in it according to the form stipulated in Clause (4) of Article (8) of this law.
 4. The licensing of a House of Worship shall not prejudice public order.
 5. Any other conditions determined by the Competent Authority.

Article (7)

Allocation of Rooms of Worship

Rooms of Worship may be allocated in coordination with the Competent Authority, and the

Executive Regulations of this law specify the conditions, controls and procedures for allocation.

Article (8)

Articles of Association

1. Every House of Worship shall have by-laws, approved at a meeting of the Founding Members.
2. Subject to the data requested by the Local Authority, the by-laws of the House of Worship shall include the following:
 - a. The name of the House of Worship and its headquarters, provided that it does not create confusion with the name of another House of Worship licensed in the same Emirate, and that its name is not linked to the name of national symbols or figures, or the name of the country or any of the Emirates or any of the regions or landmarks in the State.
 - b. The purpose for which the House of Worship is established.
 - c. An overview of the religion, sect, or belief whose practices, worships, and religious rituals shall be performed in the House of Worship, and the schedule and times for holding its religious rituals.
 - d. Membership conditions, types, procedures for acceptance and cancellation, and members rights and duties.
 - e. Rules of Articles of Association Amendment
 - f. All information related to the financial resources of the House of Worship, their sources, methods of collecting or collecting them, the rules of its management and disposal, the method of monitoring its spending, the records by which it is kept, and

- the beginning and end of its financial year.
- g. The bank accounts of the House of Worship, and the rules and controls for opening, managing, operating and closing those accounts.
 - h. Conditions and controls for the voluntary dissolution and closure of a House of Worship.
 - i. The fate of the House of Worship funds upon dissolution and liquidation.
3. A House of Worship may not make any amendments to its Articles of Association except after obtaining prior approval from the Competent Authority.
 4. The Competent Authority shall develop a model of the by-laws for Houses of Worship for guidance.

Article (9)

Licence Application

1. The Founding Members shall select from among themselves a temporary Committee whose members shall not be less than three (3) persons to act on their behalf in submitting the Licence Application and following up on the procedures stipulated in this law and its Executive Regulations.
2. The temporary Committee shall submit the Licence Application to the Competent Authority, attaching to it the by-laws signed by the Founding Members in accordance with the procedures and documents specified by the Executive Regulations of this law.
3. The Competent Authority shall study the Licence Application, and may request the temporary Committee, within sixty (60) days from the date of submitting the application, to enter any data or amendments to the Articles of Association and complete any documents.

4. The Competent Authority shall issue its decision to initially approve or reject the application within sixty (60) days of the application completing all necessary data and documents.

Article (10)

Fulfilling the Licensing Requirements and Conditions

After obtaining initial approval from the Competent Authority, the temporary Committee shall fulfil the licensing requirements and conditions specified by the Executive Regulations of this law within a term not exceeding (6) six months from the date of the initial approval. Otherwise, this approval shall be considered cancelled, and the Competent Authority may extend this term for similar terms. Not more than (3) three years if the House of Worship is still under construction or under the process of obtaining some official approvals.

Article (11)

Licence decision, term and renewal

1. The Competent Authority issues the decision to licence the House of Worship within sixty (60) days from the date on which all requirements and conditions are met.
2. The Licence term for a House of Worship is a maximum of two years.
3. The Licence shall be renewed in accordance with the conditions and procedures specified by the Executive Regulations of this law, and the Head of the Competent Authority may make an exception to the Licence term upon renewal.

Article (12)

Legal Personality

The House of Worship shall acquire legal personality from the date of issuance of the final licence from the Competent Authority.

Article (13)

The Board of Directors

1. The affairs of the House of Worship are managed by a Board of Directors concerned with providing the necessary means to carry out its activities and achieve its purposes. The Chairman of the Board of Directors shall represent the House of Worship in its dealings with others and before the judiciary.
2. Both the Chairman and members of the Board of Directors shall meet the conditions for Founders stipulated in Clause (1) of Article (6) of this law.
3. The by-laws of the House of Worship shall determine the powers of the Board of Directors, the number of its members, the term of membership, how they are selected, other conditions that shall be met by them, its work system, and other provisions.
4. The Board of Directors shall appoint a supervisor for the House of Worship, and the by-laws of the House of Worship shall determine his duties and responsibilities and the method and procedures for his appointment.

Article (14)

Annual Meeting

Every House of Worship shall hold an annual meeting, and it may hold urgent meetings

whenever the need arises. The Articles of Association of the House of Worship shall specify the rules for organising these meetings, their terms of reference, the procedures for calling them, the conditions for the validity of their holding, and the mechanism for making their decisions. The Competent Authority shall appoint a representative to attend these meetings and supervise them.

Article (15)

Financial Resources

The financial resources of a House of Worship shall consist of membership subscriptions, if any, and gifts, bequests, and grants that the House of Worship receives within its spatial framework after the approval of the Competent Authority in accordance with the provisions of this law.

Article (16)

House of Worship Funds

1. The House of Worship Funds are its property, and its Members or Founders have no right to it or claim any part thereof.
2. A House of Worship may not collect or receive donations or accept gifts, subsidies, bequests or grants from any person or entity outside the State.
3. A House of Worship may not transfer, provide, or transfer any aid, support, assistance, or funds outside the country except after obtaining prior approval from the Competent Authority.

Article (17)

Bank Accounts

Every House of Worship shall have a bank account in one of the banks operating in the State, in accordance with the controls and conditions specified by the Executive Regulations of this law.

Article (18)

Records and Books

A House of Worship shall keep at its headquarters records, books, programmes, and electronic systems related to all its activities for a term of not less than (10) ten years, and they may not be destroyed except after the approval of the Competent Authority.

Article (19)

House of Worship Obligations

The House of Worship shall comply, as follows:

1. Spend its funds to achieve the purposes for which it is established.
2. Use the House of Worship for the purposes specified in its Articles of Association.
3. Make no amendment to its by-laws, change the presidency or membership of the Board of Directors or its supervisor, or change its name or headquarters except after obtaining the approval of the Competent Authority.
4. Provide the Competent Authority with all the data and information it requests related to the affairs of the House of Worship.
5. Enable the employees of the Competent Authority to enter the headquarters of the

House of Worship, and to view and audit its documents, records, and books.

6. Provide the Competent Authority with its annual budget and financial statements within a term not exceeding three (3) months from the end of the fiscal year.
7. The legislation in force in the State.
8. Any other obligations as determined by the Competent Authority;

Article (20)

Prohibitions on the Houses and Rooms of Worship

May not use or exploit Houses or Rooms of Worship for the following:

1. Use it for purposes other than its intended use.
2. Insult the teachings on which any religion, sect, or other belief is based in accordance with the provisions of this law, or religions stipulated in other legislation in force in the State, or calling for that.
3. Interfere in the politics, internal or external affairs of the State or its law of government, or harming public order.
4. Provoke sectarian, racial, religious or ethnic strife, or calling for extremism or violence.
5. Practice any activities aimed at preaching the gospel or calling for one religion, sect, or belief.
6. Practice any worship, religious rites or rituals outside Houses of Worship.
7. Organise conferences, seminars, gatherings or events without obtaining the approval of the Competent Authority.
8. Dispose of its funds for purposes other than those for which they were established.
9. Hold external meetings and conferences or joining Places of worship, organisations, bodies, associations or entities based outside the country.

10. Practice any rites or rituals that lead to harm to oneself or others or threaten the health, safety or security of any person, visitor or worker of the House of Worship.
11. Collect donations, allowing them to be collected, or announcing them through audio, print, visual, social media, or any other means.
12. To have an official or informal relationship with the diplomatic or official institutions of any State in any capacity.
13. Interfere in the internal or foreign politics of other States or using a House of Worship as a platform for that.
14. Any other actions that the Competent Authority prohibits Houses or Rooms of Worship from performing.

Article (21)

Prohibition of Construction, Allocation or Practice in violation of the provisions of the law

1. May not establish or allocate Houses or Rooms of Worship in violation of the provisions of this law, its Executive Regulations, and the decisions issued in implementation thereof.
2. May not perform any practices or worship, hold any religious rites or rituals, or engage in any activities at the headquarters of the proposed House of Worship, before all procedures are completed and a decision is issued to licence the House of Worship.

Article (22)

Supervision

The Competent Authority has the right to supervise Houses of Worship within the scope of its purposes specified in its Articles of Association, review the financial and administrative aspects and request any information or data.

Article (23)

Data, Information and Reports

1. Local Authorities shall provide the Ministry with data, information and reports regarding the places and Rooms of Worship that it licences or allocates, in accordance with the controls and mechanisms that are agreed upon.
2. The employees of the Competent Authorities are committed to maintaining the confidentiality of these data, information and reports and not disclosing them or allowing others to access them.

Article (24)

Administrative Penalties

1. Without prejudice to criminal liability or any other administrative penalties stipulated in any other law, the Competent Authority may impose any of the following administrative penalties on Houses of Worship in the event that they violate any of the provisions of this law, its Executive Regulations, or the decisions issued in implementation thereof: -
 - a. Warning.
 - b. Temporarily suspend the activity of the House of Worship for a term not exceeding

- three (3) months, extendable for similar terms.
- c. Dismiss the Board of Directors and coordinating with the relevant authorities to appoint a temporary Board of Directors to exercise all its powers for a term of (6) six months, extendable for another similar term.
 - d. The administrative fine shall not be less than (5,000) five thousand AED and not more than (1,000,000) one million AED.
2. The Executive Regulations of this law specify the procedures for imposing penalties and filing complaints against them.

Article (25)

Mandatory Dissolution and Closure

1. Without prejudice to criminal liability, the head of the Competent Authority shall issue a decision to dissolve and close the House of Worship in coordination with the Relevant Authorities in the event of committing any of the prohibitions stipulated in Article (20) of this law.
2. The Chairman of the Board of Directors shall file appeal against the decision referred to in Clause (1) of this Article, within a term not exceeding (15) fifteen days from the date of notification. The appeal shall be decided by a reasoned decision within (30) thirty working days from the date of its submission, and the complainant shall be informed of the appeal result.

Article (26)

Voluntary Dissolution and Closure

Unless the Articles of Association stipulates otherwise, a House of Worship may be dissolved

and closed voluntarily in accordance with the following controls:

1. Based on the proposal of the Board of Directors or at least a quarter of the members of the House of Worship.
2. The Council shall invite all members of the House of Worship to an emergency meeting to decide on the proposal for dissolution and closure. The decision shall be issued by a three-quarters majority of the members attending the meeting.
3. The Board of Directors shall inform the Competent Authority of the date and place of the meeting, at least fifteen (15) days before the date specified for the meeting.
4. The decision to dissolve and close shall be issued by the Head of the Competent Authority.

Article (27)

Dissolution Rules

1. The decision issued by the Head of the Competent Authority for dissolution and closure shall determine the dissolution procedures, how to dispose of the funds, books and records of the House of Worship, and the fate of those funds unless specified by the Articles of Association or is not possible to implement.
2. The House of Worship regarding which the decision to dissolve and close is issued shall remain a legal entity to the extent necessary to complete its liquidation procedures.
3. The Head of the Competent Authority shall issue a decision to remove the House of Worship from the register after completing the dissolution procedures.

Article (28)

Penalties

1. Anyone who violates the provisions of this law and the regulations and decisions implementing it shall be punished with a fine of not less than (100,000) one hundred thousand AED and not more than (3,000,000) three million AED.
2. The imposition of the penalties stipulated in this Law shall be without prejudice to any more severe penalty stipulated in any other law.

Article (29)

Judicial Enforcement

The Minister of Justice, or the Head of the Local Judicial Authority, each within the limits of his jurisdiction, in agreement with the Head of the Competent Authority, may grant Judicial Officer capacity to some employees of the Competent Authority to prove violations of the provisions of this law, its Executive Regulations, and the decisions issued pursuant to it within the scope of their jurisdiction.

Article (30)

Reconciliation

Houses of Worship existing on the effective date of this law shall reconcile in accordance with its provisions, within (6) six months from the date of implementation of its Executive Regulations, and the Competent Authority may extend this term for similar terms not exceeding two years.

Article (31)

Executive Regulations

The Cabinet, based on the Minister proposal in coordination with the Local Authorities, shall issue the Executive Regulations for this law within (6) six months from the date of its implementation.

Article (32)

Repeals

Any provision that violates or contradicts the provisions of this Law shall be repealed.

Article (33)

Law Publication and Enforcement

This Law shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall come into force after (6) six months from the date of its publication.

Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan

President of the United Arab Emirates

Issued by Us at the Palace of the Presidency in Abu Dhabi:

Dated: May 31, 2023

Corresponding to: 11 Dhul-Qidah 1444 H