

SLOVENIA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects the freedom of individuals to practice their religion without fear of societal abuse or discrimination. The law does not require religious groups to register with government authorities, but provides preferential tax treatment only to registered religious groups. On October 31, the prime minister called for spiritual and societal renewal in public remarks emphasizing national unity irrespective of religious views. By year's end, the government had resolved the majority of restitution cases involving religious groups, although a small number of restitution claims affecting the Jewish community remained open.

During the year, the Islamic Community in Slovenia began work on the construction of the country's first mosque. The group also opened the country's first Islamic education center.

The U.S. embassy held discussions on religious freedom issues, including protection of religious groups' rights and the opening of an Islamic education center, with the government and religious leaders. The Ambassador visited the construction site of the country's first mosque, and the embassy hosted an iftar to show support for religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at two million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2002 census, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 23 percent is "other or unspecified" religious group, 2 percent is Muslim, 2 percent is Orthodox Christian, and 1 percent is "other Christian." In addition, 3 percent of the population is classified as "unaffiliated," and 10 percent states no religion. The Jewish community estimates the size of the community at approximately 300 individuals. The Orthodox and Muslim populations generally correspond to the immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to express their beliefs. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, incitement

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of religious discrimination, and inflammation of religious hatred and intolerance. The law codifies the protection of religious freedom for individuals, the status of churches and other religious communities as legal entities, the process of registration with the government, the rights of registered religious groups, and the responsibilities of the government's Office for Religious Communities.

According to the law, the rights of religious groups include: autonomy in selecting their form and constituency; the freedom to define their internal organization as well as name and define the competencies of their employees; autonomy in defining the rights and obligations of their members; the latitude to participate in inter-confessional organizations within the country or abroad; authority to provide religious services to the military, police, prisons, hospitals, and social care institutions; and the freedom to construct buildings for religious purposes. The law states religious groups have a responsibility to respect the constitution and the legal provisions on nondiscrimination.

The penal code definition of hate crimes includes publicly provoking religious, ethnic, or racial hatred and disseminating ideas of racial supremacy or diminishing the significance of genocide, the Holocaust, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. Punishment for these offenses is imprisonment for up to two years, and if the crime involves coercion, endangerment of security, desecration, or damage to property, punishment may include imprisonment for up to three years. If these offenses are committed by an official abusing the power of his or her position, the punishment may be increased to five years' imprisonment. A group which engages in these activities can be taken to court on a charge of being a hate group.

There are no formal requirements for government recognition of religious groups, and activities of religious groups are unrestricted, regardless of whether they register with the government. Religious groups must register with the Office for Religious Communities, however, if they wish to be considered legal entities and be eligible for rebates on value-added taxes. Registered religious groups have the right to request financial support from the government to pay for salaries and social benefits for religious workers.

To register, religious groups must submit a basic application to the Office for Religious Communities providing proof they fulfill the government's requirements: at least 10 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents; the name of the religious group in Latin, which must be clearly distinguishable from the name of other religious groups; the group's address in the country; a copy

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of its official seal to be used in legal transactions; and payment of a 22.66 euro (\$27.57) administrative tax. Religious groups must also provide the names of the group's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the group's religious beliefs, and a copy of its organizational act. The government may only refuse the registration of a religious group that does not provide the required application materials in full, or if the Office for Religious Communities determines a group fits the definition of a hate group. Once a group has been registered, the determination of whether it is a hate group must be made by the courts.

The law, in particular legislation on denationalization and criminal sanctions, establishes regulations and procedures to handle property restitution cases stemming from the Communist regime's confiscation of public property and the property of religious groups, such as the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, after World War II. In accordance with the law, citizens can apply for the return of property nationalized between 1945 and 1963. The law states one-tenth of social property, such as land and forests, can be returned to former owners, with monetary compensation provided to former owners who cannot be compensated in kind.

The government requires all schools to include education on world religions in their curricula, with instruction provided by school teachers. The law also mandates Holocaust education in schools. Instruction focuses on the history of the Holocaust inside and outside the country. A booklet published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is used as part of the Holocaust education curriculum.

Individuals have the right to file complaints about abuses of religious freedom committed by national or local authorities with the Office of the Ombudsman for the Protection of Human Rights. The ombudsman's office may then forward these complaints to the court whereupon the complaints are considered formal.

Government Practices

By year's end, the government had adjudicated approximately 99 percent of the 1,191 Catholic denationalization claims for properties nationalized after World War II. The Ministry of Justice no longer tracked data for the remaining unsettled cases. The World Jewish Restoration Organization continued to negotiate with the government regarding a small number of outstanding claims for restitution affecting the country's Jewish community.

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The government allowed churches and religious groups to provide religious education in both private and state-subsidized schools and preschools only on a voluntary basis outside of the school curriculum.

On October 31, Prime Minister Cerar called for spiritual and societal renewal in public remarks on the Reformation Day holiday, emphasizing national unity irrespective of religious views.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On November 6, the Islamic Community opened the country's first Islamic education center. At the center's launch, Mufti Nedžad Grabus said the center was an important step to promote co-existence among the country's religious communities.

The Islamic Community commissioned a contract for construction of the country's first mosque, and work began during the year. Mufti Grabus welcomed the long-anticipated mosque construction project as a "major landmark" for the Muslim community.

In September the National Museum of Contemporary History sponsored a traveling exhibition on the life of Anne Frank to provide information to students about World War II and promote Holocaust awareness.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy met regularly with government officials responsible for safeguarding religious freedom, including the Office for Religious Communities. Embassy representatives also met regularly with representatives of all major religious groups to discuss the protection of the rights of religious groups and developments such as the opening of the Islamic education center.

The Embassy hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing together leaders from the country's Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities to bolster links among the various religious communities.

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The Ambassador met regularly with Mufti Grabus to support the Islamic Community's mosque construction project. On November 13, the Ambassador and Mufti Grabus jointly toured the mosque construction site and publicly praised the mosque project as an important contribution to religious tolerance.