

## **UKRAINE 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

In February 2014, Russia began its military intervention in Ukraine when its forces occupied Crimea. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262, adopted on March 27, 2014, and entitled “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine,” states the Autonomous Republic of Crimea remains internationally recognized as within Ukraine’s international borders. The U.S. government does not recognize the attempted annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and considers Crimea still to be a part of Ukraine.

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#### **Executive Summary**

The constitution protects freedom of religion and belief and provides for the separation of church and state. According to the law on religion, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship. The government extended tax-free status to religious organizations, recognized religious educational institutions, and introduced a military chaplaincy. The government investigation into attempts by former President Viktor Yanukovich to pressure the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) to replace the Church’s leader continued. The UOC-MP stated that local officials provided assistance to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) in an attempt to take over UOC-MP churches. The High Specialized Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases overturned several convictions of conscientious objectors who sought alternative military service. Russian-backed separatists continued to control parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Separatists kidnapped, detained, beat, and threatened members of the UOC-KP, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Protestant churches. Separatists also engaged in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Russian-backed separatists continued to vandalize and seize church property, proclaiming that only certain, official churches were free to practice.

Religious leaders called for an end to violence in the Donbas region and an end to the Russian occupation of Crimea. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) promoted interconfessional dialogue while calling for peace in the eastern part of the country. Throughout the year, some UOC-MP parishes changed allegiance to the UOC-KP, with the UOC-MP stating that many of these cases were due to coercion by right wing political groups, at times backed by local governments. The UOC-KP said that the churches were

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changing allegiance according to their own decisions and were permitted to do so under the country's law. Jehovah's Witnesses said they were subjected to violence and harassment. There were reports of vandalism at Jewish and Christian religious sites, particularly those of the UOC-MP. The UOC-KP condemned the use of force at disputed churches. The UOC-MP condemned instances of separatist abuse and refused to accept religious buildings which were offered to them.

The U.S. Ambassador, embassy officers, and other U.S. government officials continued to engage with the government, religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to raise concerns over religious freedom and anti-Semitism, including the restitution of communal property and the rights of foreign religious workers. The U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs visited Kyiv for meetings with religious leaders, government officials, and experts. The embassy encouraged churches to settle property disputes in a peaceful and legal manner and encouraged local governments to protect religious properties such as churches and cemeteries. Following a series of attacks on the Babyn Yar memorial in Kyiv, the Embassy encouraged the government to provide better security.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 44.4 million (July 2015 estimate). According to a February national survey by the independent polling groups Center for Social and Marketing Research, SOCIS, Sociological Group Rating, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, and the Razumkov Center, 73.7 percent of respondents self-identify as Christian Orthodox, broken down into 37.9 percent identifying with the UOC-KP, 19.6 percent with the UOC-MP, 39.1 percent with neither Orthodox Church and self-identifying as "just an Orthodox believer," 1.3 percent identified with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), and 1.1 percent undecided about affiliation.

UOC-KP followers are located mostly in the western oblasts (regions) of the country, with some in the central and Kherson Oblasts (provinces). The UOC-MP is present in all regions of the country, but has a smaller presence in the Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Ternopil Oblasts. The UAOC has most of its adherents in the western part of the country.

The February survey also estimates 8.1 percent of the population self-identifies as Greek Catholic, 0.8 percent as Roman Catholic, 0.9 percent as Protestant, and 0.7 percent as followers of "other" religious groups. The survey listed Christian

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denominations only as choices. Another 8.5 percent self-identify as “just a Christian” and 6.1 percent say they do not belong to any religious group.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is the largest non-Orthodox church, with an estimated four million members and in full communion with the Holy See. It is primarily in the western oblasts of Lviv, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil. The Roman Catholic Church estimates it has one million members.

Government agencies and independent think tanks estimate the Muslim population at 500,000. According to government figures, the majority are Crimean Tatars numbering an estimated 300,000. Some Muslim leaders put the number at two million. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine is the largest Protestant community. Other Christian groups include Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Calvinists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are also Buddhists, practitioners of Falun Gong, and adherents of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. According to the most recent government census data from 2001, there are an estimated 103,600 Jews in the country; however, some local Jewish leaders estimate the number of persons of Jewish heritage to be as high as 370,000.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship, a right that “may be restricted by law only in the interests of protecting public order, the health and morality of the population, or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons.” The constitution provides for the separation of church and state and stipulates that “no religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory.” According to the constitution, organizers must notify local authorities in advance of a planned religious gathering and authorities have the option to challenge the legality of the planned event.

According to the law on religion, the objective of domestic religious policy is to “restore full-fledged dialogue between representatives of various social, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship.”

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The law on religion requires religious organizations to apply to local government authorities at least 10 days in advance for permission to hold religious services and ceremonies in public spaces; such permission is not required to hold services at religious or burial sites, private residences, homes for the elderly and disabled, medical and penal institutions, or premises of companies. Government agencies authorized to monitor religious organizations include the prosecutor general, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and all other “central bodies of the executive government.”

The law requires religious groups to register with the State Registration Service (a part of the Ministry of Justice) and with the Ministry of Culture, the government’s lead agency on religious affairs, or regional government authorities. To be eligible for registration, a religious group must have at least 10 adult members. The law does not specify which of the two registration procedures must be undertaken first.

Registration is required for a religious group to receive status as a legal entity. Without legal entity status, a religious group may not own property, conduct banking activities, or publish materials. Nationwide religious organizations cannot be registered or recognized as legal entities and therefore cannot own property or conduct other business activities, although their registered constituent units can.

Only registered religious groups may seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the Communist regime. Religious groups must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. The law states that consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month.

The parliament adopted tax code amendments granting immovable property tax exemptions to religious organizations on May 14. July 17, the parliament adopted further tax code amendments adding religious organizations to the list of nonprofit organizations.

The law allows religious groups to establish theological schools to train clergy and other religious workers. The law allows theological schools to seek state accreditation for their curriculum. The law states theological schools shall function on the basis of their own statutes, which are registered by the Ministry of Culture. On August 19, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the procedure of state recognition of academic degrees awarded by the theological schools. The law restricts the teaching of religion as part of the public school curriculum; religious organizations are prohibited from interference in the educational process in public

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schools. Public schools include ethics of faith courses as an optional part of the curriculum.

The law provides for antidiscrimination screening of draft legislation and government regulations, including on the basis of religion. The law specifies that screening will be conducted in accordance with instructions developed by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors and bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization.

The Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsman is constitutionally required to release an annual report to parliament with a section on religious freedom.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious groups and defines the permissible activities of noncitizen clergy, preachers, teachers, and other representatives of foreign-based religious organizations. Under the law, foreign religious workers are permitted to “preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,” but they may do so only for the religious organization which invited them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities.

On January 27, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) issued new regulations concerning the chaplaincy service in the armed forces, following a 2014 Cabinet of Ministers’ order creating a chaplain corps for the armed forces, for the National Guard, and for the State Border Guard Service. The MoD document defines selection criteria for clerics to become chaplains, the status of chaplains in the chain of command, their rights, and their duties. The law requires commanders of military units to allow their subordinates to participate in religious services.

On May 14, the parliament adopted amendments to the criminal executive code and law on pretrial detention, expanding access to prison chaplains both for pretrial detainees and sentenced inmates. The law also protects the confidentiality of confession heard by prison chaplains, prohibits the use of information received during confession as evidence in legal proceedings, and does not allow the

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interrogation of clerics, interpreters, or other persons about matters associated with the confidentiality of confession.

### Government Practices

On January 22, the Prosecutor-General's Office (PGO) completed an investigation against police officers who in 2013 detained Metropolitan Oleksandr, personal secretary of then-UOC-MP leader, Metropolitan Volodymyr. The detention reportedly was part of an effort by ex-President Yanukovich, the former prosecutor-general, the former interior minister, and other high-level officials of the Yanukovich government, to remove Metropolitan Volodymyr from his leadership position because he did not support church involvement in politics.

The PGO concluded that Yanukovich-era Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko, then-Kyiv Police Chief Valeriy Koryak, and the commander and deputy commander of the Kyiv-based Gryphon police unit unlawfully detained Metropolitan Oleksandr for six months. Zakharchenko, Koryak, and the Gryphon officers were charged with unlawful imprisonment and abuse of office. Both Zakharchenko and Koryak fled the country after the protests against then-President Yanukovich in 2014.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on July 17 the Osytniashka Village council in Kirovohrad Oblast decided to ban the registration of any religious organization except for a local Orthodox congregation. Referring to this decision, on August 18, the village mayor reportedly prohibited some Jehovah's Witnesses from telling local residents about the Bible and ordered them to leave the village immediately.

On August 25, President Petro Poroshenko approved the National Human Rights Strategy. The document aimed to improve the procedure for state registration of religious organizations and for approval of peaceful religious gatherings. The national strategy also aimed to "ensure effective investigation of religiously motivated and other hate crimes, and prosecution of offenders."

Religious leaders and human rights activists continued to urge the government to simplify religious registration procedures and lift the requirement for a government permit to hold peaceful religious assemblies. They also encouraged the government to adopt the Concept of Church-State Relations, which was drafted by religious groups and experts in 2004, to shape cooperation between the government and religious groups and provide the basis for legislation on religion

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issues. According to the AUCCRO, the Concept of Church-State Relations was designed to “tackle consequences of the atheist past, secure constitutional freedoms, and establish specific mechanisms of cooperation between religious organizations and the state.” Among other things, the document describes the rule of law and the equality of citizens and their associations before the law as the foundation for all legal relations in Ukraine in the area of religious freedom.

UOC-MP representatives complained about what they said was the central government’s inadequate response to increasing discrimination and intolerance toward its faithful by UOC-KP representatives and high-ranking UOC-KP supporters in some local governments. According to the UOC-MP, emboldened by police inaction and support from radical groups, particularly activists from Right Sector political party, some local government representatives, and businessmen, the UOC-KP intensified efforts to seize a number of UOC-MP church buildings. Some of the incidents occurred after local authorities had transferred parish jurisdictions from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP, reportedly against the will of some parish members.

Right Sector representatives claimed they had visited the disputed sites on the UOC-KP’s request to facilitate the change of jurisdiction and protect UOC-KP followers from “violent attacks” by UOC-MP supporters. The UOC-KP attributed Right Sector involvement to the fact that parishioners themselves “often turn to patriotic organizations” for protection. The UOC-KP Ternopil Diocese said that UOC-MP parishioners were “forced to go to temples of the Russian Church in Ukraine [reference to UOC-MP] and pray for their murderers and invaders.”

On September 7, the Ternopil Oblast State Administration issued a resolution that the UOC-MP St. George parish in Katerynivka, Ternopil Oblast, should use its church on a rotational basis with a newly created local UOC-KP congregation. The UOC-MP appealed the decision in court. The UOC-MP stated that on September 21 the UOC-KP supporters arrived at the church, accompanied by about two dozen members of Right Sector. The UOC-MP said the group then forcefully occupied the church building, insisting that it belonged to the UOC-KP. During the seizure, Right Sector members reportedly threw a smoke bomb into a private house as they chased a UOC-MP church guard and detained him. The UOC-MP stated police representatives sided with Right Sector representatives, denying UOC-MP members entry to the churchyard. Members of the UOC-MP stated that several of their followers forced their way into the yard, demanding that their priest be allowed to enter the church. Police ordered them to leave the site. After they

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refused, riot police used batons and physical violence to chase them from the yard and continued to beat some who fell behind. Right Sector representatives also participated in chasing UOC-MP followers, using pepper spray and physical violence. The UOC-MP said 15 of their representatives were injured and several of them were hospitalized. Some were reportedly afraid to seek medical assistance, following statements that Right Sector representatives were forcing victims to retract complaints lodged at a local police department and had visited a local hospital requesting medical staff disclose identities of the injured. A local police representative told the media that the riot police had to use force in self-defense.

On September 23, the Right Sector issued a statement describing the Katerynivka incident as part of a “fight against Moscow’s stooges and separatists” and vowing to use “any available means to defend the development of a local Ukrainian Christian Church.”

According to the UOC-MP, since April 26, masked Right Sector representatives armed with sticks and knives repeatedly visited Kolosova village, Kremenets District, Ternopil Oblast to intimidate members of the local UOC-MP parish of St. John the Theologian, who opposed the change of parish jurisdiction to the UOC-KP. At times, the Right Sector activists reportedly brought “fighting breed” dogs to the village in an attempt to put more pressure on UOC-MP followers.

In July the Kremenets District State Administration set up a coordination council to solve the parish jurisdiction dispute. The administration also warned the Ternopil Oblast State Administration against hasty reregistration of the Kolosova UOC-MP parish as part of UOC-KP, saying that not all members of the parish wanted to join the UOC-KP.

On August 26, the Kremenets District Court prohibited the Ternopil Oblast State Administration from reregistering the Kolosova parish. On August 28, following a protest by local UOC-KP followers, the Ternopil Oblast State Administration chairman issued the reregistration order, thereby transferring the church building to the UOC-KP. The chairman stated that he only learned of the court ban after he had signed the order. The UOC-MP said its parishioners would no longer be able to hold religious services at the church because the oblast administration’s decision had deregistered its congregation.



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The Ministry of Culture encouraged the UOC-MP to resume dialogue with the UOC-KP in a working group set up in 2014 to mediate disputes between the two Churches.

As Russia's occupation of Crimea continued and Russian-backed separatists retained control of portions of Donbas, the reported seizure of UOC-KP properties in those areas continued.

In certain regions of the country, smaller religious groups continued to report discriminatory treatment by local authorities in allocating land for buildings. In the central and southern regions, Roman Catholics, UOC-KP members, UGCC members, and Muslims reported similar instances of discrimination. According to UGCC representatives, local authorities in Odesa remained unwilling to allocate land for UGCC churches. UOC-MP representatives reported a continued refusal by local governments in the Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk regions to allocate land for UOC-MP churches. According to Roman Catholics, the government continued to refuse to facilitate the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary building, which was confiscated by the Soviet regime. According to the Baptist Union, the local government in Ivano-Frankivsk delayed allocation of land for construction of a church. Due to the local government's unwillingness to allocate the land, the Baptists independently purchased a plot of land in the city. According to Mormon representatives, the city government in Kyiv rescinded a lease on land to build a house of worship.

All major religious organizations continued to urge the government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims. Most organizations reported problems and delays in the restitution process to reclaim property seized by the Communist regime, with the consideration of a claim frequently taking longer than the month prescribed by law. Complications for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim properties included intercommunity competition for particular properties, current use by state institutions, designation of some properties as historic landmarks, local government jurisdictional issues, and previous transfer to private ownership. At times, local officials took sides in disputes pertaining to property restitution. The Roman Catholic Church urged authorities to return former Church properties in the western part of the country and elsewhere. Jewish community leaders reported continued property restitution difficulties with the Ternopil and Kyiv municipal governments. Muslim community leaders expressed concern about unresolved restitution claims involving historic religious buildings in Mykolayiv.

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The AUCCRO continued to call on parliament to impose a moratorium on the privatization of previously confiscated religious buildings.

On June 4, the Rivne Appellate Economic Court upheld the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union appeal of the 2007 decision by the Kovel District State Administration, Volyn Oblast, to allow the construction of a private industrial facility on the grounds of a Jewish cemetery near Toykut village, Volyn Oblast. The court also revoked the 2008 contract on the lease of the cemetery's land. On November 25, the High Economic Court of Ukraine overturned the June 4 Rivne appellate court ruling, reinstating the original lower court ruling and renewing the construction permit.

In April the Vinnitsya City Council stopped construction of a private residence on a Jewish cemetery that had been illegally privatized.

The Jewish community expressed concern with the failure of local government authorities to protect historical religious properties. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has not appointed anyone to the office of the Special Representative for Prevention and Combatting Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia.

On June 2, the parliament passed legislation allowing registered religious organizations to establish private educational institutions where students, in addition to a secular curriculum, would be educated according to the religious values of the organization.

The Ternopil City and Kyiv City Councils, on February 27 and January 28, respectively, granted property tax exemptions to all local churches, except for those affiliated with the UOC-MP. According to a deputy of the Kyiv City Council, the UOC-MP's tax exemption was revoked because it allegedly held an "anti-Ukrainian position." On June 18, Kyiv's District Administrative Court revoked the Kyiv City Council resolution on the basis that it violated the principle of religious freedom and, on July 30, the Kyiv Appellate Administrative Court upheld the ruling.

In a February 17 meeting with the AUCCRO, an independent interfaith board representing more than 90 percent of the country's religious organizations, President Poroshenko emphasized that all churches and religious organizations in the country had equal rights. The AUCCRO pledged to combat what the organization said were Russian attempts to create religious tension in the country.

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During a September 16 meeting with the AUCCRO, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said that the government would continue to address all religious freedom abuses.

On April 24, the MFA, religious leaders and experts created a civic council for cooperation with religious organizations, an advisory body designed to develop MFA interaction with religious communities. The council met three times during the year, discussing issues such as combatting Russian propaganda, participation of religious groups in international forums, assisting international religious events in the country such as the Uman pilgrimage, and monitoring the religious situation.

In April the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine appealed to the president and prime minister to grant members of the clergy exemption from the military mobilization resulting from Russia's military intervention in the east of the country. The council also complained about continuing attempts by the armed forces to call up conscientious objectors for military duty. Members of the council and legal experts attributed such attempts primarily to legislative gaps, including the lack of alternative civilian service during mobilization for the current conflict, and urged the government to rectify the issue.

On June 23, the High Specialized Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases upheld a February 26 ruling by the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Appellate Court confirming a November 2014 verdict by the Novomoskovsk District Court that the application of Jehovah's Witness member Vitaliy Shalaiko for alternative civilian service had been improperly denied. The court ruled that, in addition to regular military conscription, conscientious objectors had the right to alternative service during mobilization. There were no subsequent prosecutions involving alternative service.

On September 29, the High Specialized Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases made a similar ruling in overturning a May 28 Rivne Oblast Appellate Court ruling. The appellate court had upheld the March 13 verdict by the Volodymyretsky District Court sentencing an evangelical church member and conscientious objector to two years imprisonment for "dodging" mobilization.

On June 11, the Kharkiv District Administrative Court supported an appeal by Pavlo Bakum, a member of the New Generation Evangelical Christian Church and

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a conscientious objector, of the May decision by Kharkiv's Frunzensky District military office to call up Bakum for military service.

### **Abuses by Foreign Forces and Non-State Actors**

Russian-backed separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts continued to kidnap, beat, and threaten Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of the UOC-KP. Separatists also participated in anti-Semitic acts. A report on religious persecution prepared by the Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights in April concluded that Christian believers not belonging to the UOC-MP were subjected to "widespread and systematic attack by the rebel groups."

UOC-KP priest Ihor Petrenko and volunteer Vadym Perepada went missing on February 14, while driving to visit Ukrainian troops stationed in the Donetsk Oblast. According to the media, the two mistakenly drove to a separatist-controlled checkpoint near Olenivka Village and were beaten, detained by militants, and later released.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on May 21 armed security forces of separatists in Luhansk Oblast detained two elderly Jehovah's Witnesses in Stakhanov. The detainees were beaten during their interrogation, accused of espionage, and pressured to convert to Orthodoxy. The victims were released on June 2 and June 3 and ordered to leave the region.

Jehovah's Witnesses also reported that on May 17, gunmen in separatist-controlled Donetsk kidnapped four Jehovah's Witnesses in Markyne and subjected them to mock executions. The detainees were beaten during questioning. They were released on May 18 after spending a night in a makeshift prison.

On September 23, separatists seized Pentecostal Pastor Taras Sen in Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast, and held him for four days. Separatist authorities stated he was detained for speaking with members of an observation mission from the Organization for Security and Economic Cooperation. On October 6, he reported he had been freed and had suffered injuries while detained. In October separatists in Luhansk suspended the activities of the pastor's religious organization, Christ is the Answer, because it was not registered.

During a May press conference, Donetsk separatist leader Oleksandr Zakharchenko stated only Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Muslims, and Jews were

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permitted to function there. He threatened to take “tough action against various sects and pseudoreligions.”

On October 1, several hundred persons gathered at a Baptist church in Shakhtarsk, Donetsk Oblast, holding signs stating that “sects” should be forbidden in separatist-held territory. Separatists, who reportedly do not permit spontaneous protests in areas they control, monitored the event but did not intervene.

On March 4, separatists in Luhansk Oblast reportedly seized a Baptist church in Antratsyt.

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, between June and November armed groups seized 10 Kingdom Halls in separatist-held areas in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, saying the municipalities had ordered them to seize the buildings, although these orders were never produced in front of the owners. Following the loss of the Kingdom Halls, Jehovah’s Witnesses in the region conducted their worship in private homes. In November Jehovah’s Witnesses stated that 15 houses of worship remained controlled by separatists.

On February 1, armed men reportedly seized the Kingdom Hall on Moskovska Street in Donetsk, saying, “Jehovah’s Witnesses are a sect. There should be no Jehovah’s Witnesses on this territory.” They threatened to detain and punish any local Jehovah’s Witnesses who tried to leave the city.

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, on March 3 armed separatists in Donetsk Oblast seized the Kingdom Hall in Yenakiyev, stating that it would be transformed into a barracks.

In late March UOC-KP Archbishop Yevstratii Zorya stated that separatists had destroyed the cupola of a church in Oktiabr, Donetsk Oblast.

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, on March 26, armed separatists in Luhansk Oblast broke into the Kingdom Hall in Brianka. They stole all the furniture and removed the Kingdom Hall sign.

In April armed separatists “temporarily seized” the building of a Jewish school, Beyt Menachem, in Luhansk, planning to house a “cadet corps” or “social canteen” there.

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On September 22, the Evangelical Christian Baptist church in Krasnyi Luch, Luhansk Oblast stated that separatist authorities demanded a list of parishioners and threatened the church would suffer consequences if it did not comply.

During a February 2 joint press conference, separatist “leaders” in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, Oleksandr Zakharchenko and Ihor Plotnitsky, referred to the central government in Kyiv as “pathetic representatives of the great Jewish people.” The following day, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and Anti-Defamation League (ADL) strongly condemned the remarks, with the ADL stating it was deeply troubled by a thinly veiled anti-Semitic appeal made by the leadership of the Donetsk and Luhansk “people’s republics.”

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

Throughout the year, Jehovah’s Witnesses were subjected to violence; they reported dozens of incidents of physical abuse. UOC-MP members complained about efforts by UOC-KP members to seize churches that previously had belonged to the UOC-MP. The UOC-MP condemned instances of separatist abuse and refused to accept religious buildings that were offered to them. There were reports of anti-Semitic acts of vandalism, including the desecration of Holocaust memorials, as well as vandalism of Christian churches.

On July 25, unidentified gunmen shot Roman Nikolayev, rector of UOC-MP St. Tetyana’s parish in Kyiv, at the entrance to his apartment. He died on July 29 from two bullet wounds to the head. Although no link to the victim’s religion has been determined, the UOC-MP expressed concern over lack of progress in the police investigation of the killing.

According to the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress (EAJC), one incident of suspected anti-Semitic violence was recorded during the year, compared to four cases of anti-Semitic violence in 2014, four such cases in 2013, and three such incidents with four victims in 2012.

In April the head of the European Jewish Congress donated \$100,000 to strengthen Jewish communal security in Kyiv, which the recipients stated would allow for constant security coverage of Jewish institutions in the city.

From January to October the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported 31 religiously motivated incidents of physical assault against adherents.

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According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on September 22, secondary school students severely beat 11-year-old Oleksandr Romanchykov in Berdyansk, Zaporizhya Oblast. They called the boy a "sect member." He was hospitalized with a concussion. Police reportedly refused to investigate the incident.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March 4 and 5, three teenagers twice beat 12-year-old Serhiy Kholodov on his way to school in Myropil, Zhytomyr Oblast. The attackers shouted "Jehovah!" Police reportedly declined to investigate the attack as a hate crime.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on March 15, two men shouting, "Sect members, get out of our village!" beat Jehovah's Witness Andriy Bilinsky and pushed nine-year-old Adam Orlenko in Oryshkivtsi, Ternopil Oblast. Police closed the investigation after the victims accepted the attackers' apology.

On April 27, the Smila City and District Court in Cherkasy Oblast found UOC-MP priest Oleksandr Hahan guilty on five counts of religiously motivated abuse and assault committed against Jehovah's Witnesses in 2013-2014 and handed down a three-year suspended sentence.

On May 21, police closed a criminal case against UOC-MP priest Oleksiy Greku in Komyshivka, Odesa Oblast, finding no crimes had been committed. The Jehovah's Witnesses disputed the decision, stating that in April 2014, Greku hit a Jehovah's Witness member with his car and attacked another with an engine belt. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, this was the fifth incident involving Greku that went unpunished.

According to the UOC-MP, on March 18, UOC-KP followers in Uhryniv village, Volyn Oblast assaulted UOC-MP Archpriest Rostyslav Sapozhnyk, Rector of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, as he was trying to enter the church, reportedly seized by the UOC-KP in 2014. The archpriest suffered a head injury. Police investigators were reportedly unwilling to launch a probe into the incident.

UOC-KP representatives repeatedly rejected accusations about their involvement in the seizure of UOC-MP churches, saying the parishioners using those church buildings had themselves initiated legitimate transfers to UOC-KP jurisdiction.

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On May 12 and October 21, the UOC-KP issued statements reiterating its condemnation of violence and calls for violence against UOC-MP clerics, lay members, and churches. The UOC-KP said it would continue to act according to the law, accepting into its jurisdiction any UOC-MP clergy and laity requesting UOC-KP affiliation.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, there were 56 incidents of vandalism, five of which were arson, against Kingdom Halls from January to October.

On July 15, the walls of the Kingdom Hall in Zabolotiv, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast were painted with insulting graffiti. Police officers who came to the scene reportedly refused to thoroughly investigate and gather evidence, claiming that such incidents "happen only in movies." On September 9, an investigative judge ordered police investigators to open an investigation, but the police did not implement the order.

The EAJC identified 22 incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism during the year, as compared to 15 in 2014 and seven in 2013.

In September the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the Uman burial site of Rabbi Nakhman took place without significant incident. According to the Cherkasy Oblast government, a record 32,000 pilgrims visited Uman during the year. Jewish pilgrims visited other burial sites of prominent spiritual leaders in Belz, Medzhybizh, Berdychiv, and Hadyach without significant incident.

On the eve of the Jewish New Year, September 13, unknown vandals put tires around the Menorah monument to Holocaust victims in Kyiv, poured incendiary liquid on the monument, and set it on fire. A guard at a nearby UOC-MP church put out the fire.

Jewish community leaders issued a statement criticizing the authorities for their inability to improve security in the area or investigate previous acts of vandalism against the memorial, including five instances that occurred since January. In January, April, and June unidentified perpetrators painted swastikas on the monument. The Ministry of Interior pledged to improve security at the site. According to the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group, however, officials have not found or charged any individuals who committed anti-Semitic acts over the last several years.



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Holocaust memorials were set afire and/or vandalized in Melitopol, Nikopol, and Mykolaiv according to press reports and NGOs. The investigations remained open at the end of the year.

On April 22, unidentified arsonists attacked the UOC-MP's Joy of All Who Sorrow Church in Kyiv, damaging a wall, according to the church and press reports. On January 26, unknown vandals carried out an arson attack on the church, throwing six Molotov cocktails at the building. The attack caused minor damage and the security guard quickly put out the fire. The investigation remained open at the end of the year.

On January 27, unidentified vandals set fire to the UOC-MP St. Tryphon Church in Kyiv, damaging the roof and a wall. The attackers left a note demanding the UOC-MP to "get out of Ukraine." The crime remained under investigation.

In June a voluntary emergency medical service ambulance serving mostly the Jewish community was destroyed by fire. According to preliminary investigations by the police, it was an anti-Semitic attack.

The Jewish cemetery in Kolomyia was damaged in two arson attacks on September 19 and October 23. In both cases unknown attackers set fire to a small house of worship at the grave of Rabbi Tsadik Gillel Borukh Lichtenstein.

The Jewish community's concerns about the continued existence of the Krakivskiy Market in Lviv, located on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery, remained unresolved. During the year, a chapel was constructed within the boundaries of the cemetery, which was later consecrated by the UGCC. It is unclear if any remains were disturbed. The city claimed it had no knowledge of the chapel's construction.

Crimean Tatar internally displaced persons established a Muslim prayer room at the Islamic Cultural Center in Lviv, but city officials have not permitted the construction of a mosque.

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

The Ambassador, embassy officers, and other U.S. government officials raised concerns over religious freedom and anti-Semitism with the presidential administration, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, MFA, members of parliament, political parties, and local officials. The Ambassador raised the

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broader topics of communal property restitution and cultural heritage preservation in meetings and correspondence with government officials at the highest levels. In Lviv, the embassy continued to monitor disputes related to the site of the city's former main synagogue, which was destroyed during the Holocaust, and the Old Jewish Cemetery, parts of which are now occupied by the Krakivskiy Market. In Vinnitsya, the embassy monitored illegal construction at a Jewish cemetery. The embassy encouraged religious groups involved in property disputes to resolve issues peacefully. The embassy monitored the Jewish pilgrimage in Uman. The embassy continued to intervene with the government as necessary to defend foreign religious workers' rights to due process under the law.

The U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs met with religious leaders and experts. He encouraged them to continue their cooperation and noted the work of the AUCCRO to promote interfaith dialogue.

The embassy maintained contact with local religious and political leaders. Embassy officers met with religious figures and government officials in Lviv regarding the status of the Old Jewish Cemetery, visiting the site, and encouraging all parties to find a solution that respected the needs of the religious community. Embassy officials also met with Muslim internally displaced persons from Crimea, and discussed the restitution of religious property. The embassy continued to monitor cases involving discrimination against Crimean Tatars in Crimea, in particular the situation of the Spiritual Administration of Crimean Muslims under Russian occupation. The Ambassador and embassy officers also met with leaders of major religious groups in Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv, Uman, Vinnytsya, and Lviv to understand better the concerns of these communities. Embassy officers participated in a ceremony to commemorate the anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre, emphasizing the need for religious tolerance and respect, as well as ceremonies honoring Holocaust survivors and rescuers.

## **CRIMEA**

### **Executive Summary**

In February 2014, armed forces of the Russian Federation seized and occupied Crimea. In March 2014, Russia announced Crimea had become part of the Russian Federation. A UN General Assembly resolution declared continued international recognition of Crimea as within Ukraine's international borders. The U.S. government does not recognize the attempted annexation of Crimea by the Russian

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Federation and maintains that Crimea continues to be part of Ukraine. Occupation forces imposed de facto laws of the Russian Federation on the territory of Crimea. Occupation authorities subjected religious minorities, in particular the UOC-KP, UGCC, and Crimean Tatars to harassment, intimidation, and detention, according to human rights groups. These authorities ordered all religious groups to register with the Russian government by January 1, 2016, or face losing their legal status. The authorities raided mosques, confiscated literature they deemed “extremist,” and subjected the leadership of Crimean Tatar Muslims to surveillance and intimidation.

Religious leaders called for an end to the Russian occupation of Crimea. Religious minorities were subject to social harassment and intimidation as well as to a media campaign that portrayed the Crimean Tatar community as “extremists” and “traitors” and the UOC-KP and the UGCC as “schismatics” or “Uniates.” Muslim religious properties were vandalized.

The U.S. government publicly condemned religious abuses committed by Russian occupation authorities in Crimea, particularly the use of “extremism laws” to search, harass, and intimidate religious congregations, especially of Muslim Crimean Tatars. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv were unable to visit the peninsula following its occupation by the Russian Federation but were able to meet with Crimean Muslim and Christian leaders in other parts of the country to demonstrate U.S. support for their right to practice their religious beliefs.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The Crimean peninsula consists of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the city of Sevastopol. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the total population of the peninsula is 2,353,000. No recent independent survey provides data on the religious affiliation of the population.

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, in 2014 there were 2,083 religious organizations (a term including parishes, congregations, theological schools, monasteries, and other constituent parts of a church or religious group) in the ARC and 137 in Sevastopol. The numbers included organizations both with and without legal entity status. Muslims had 1,007 religious organizations in the ARC, of which 921 were affiliated with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (SAMC), Ukraine’s biggest Muslim group. The UOC-MP was and remains the largest Christian denomination with 535 religious organizations. Other Christian

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denominations included the UOC-KP with 44 organizations, Roman Catholicism with 13, UAOC with 10, and the UGCC with nine. There were 280 Protestant churches, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Lutherans, as well as 80 Jehovah's Witness organizations.

There are approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars, who make up 13 percent of the population and are overwhelmingly Muslim. There are several Jewish congregations, mostly in Sevastopol and Simferopol. Adherents of the UOC-MP, Protestants, and Muslims are the largest religious groups in Sevastopol.

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

#### **Legal Framework**

Pursuant to international recognition that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea remains within Ukraine's international borders, Crimea continues to be officially subject to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. In the aftermath of Russia's occupation and attempted annexation, however, the occupation authorities implement the laws of the Russian Federation de facto on the territory.

#### **Government Practices**

The occupation authorities subjected religious minorities, in particular the UOC-KP, the UGCC, and Muslim Crimean Tatars, to harassment, intimidation, and detentions, according to human rights and international organizations. Authorities ordered all religious groups to reregister with the Russian government by January 1, 2016, or face loss of their legal status. Security services continued to raid mosques and confiscate literature they deemed extremist.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on June 2, authorities in Simferopol arrested eight members who were distributing religious literature, accusing them of "picketing" illegally.

Police detained, questioned, and examined the literature of nine members of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in May after the village council chair halted their event in Saky, according to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission. Police fined eight of them for conducting an outdoor religious meeting. Seven appealed the fines. The cases remained pending at the end of the year.

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According to human rights monitors, Russian authorities detained four Crimean Tatars, Ruslan Zeytullaev, Nuri (Yuri) Primov, Rustem Vaitov, and Ferat Sayfulaev, accusing them of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir. The human rights monitors stated that Hizb ut-Tahrir was not an illegal group in Ukraine and that the Crimean Tatar community said the Russian occupation authorities were using the case to suppress all observant Muslims, particularly Crimean Tatars.

The occupation authorities required all religious organizations, defined as individual parishes, congregations, schools, monasteries, and other organizations, to comply with Russian Federal law and register by January 1, 2016. Only Russian citizens were allowed to register a religious community. As of August 10, only 53 organizations had registered, compared to approximately 1,400 organizations registered by Ukrainian authorities in 2014. Many members of religious minorities, especially Crimean Tatars, Greek Catholics, and members of the UOC-KP, refused Russian citizenship. Those who refused Russian citizenship, or who were citizens of other nations, were subject to expulsion if they were not granted residency. Loss of registration could impact land ownership, taxation, utilities, and the number and purpose of religious meetings. Human rights monitors reported that imams at Crimean Tatar mosques, most of whom remained unregistered at the end of the year, had to inform occupation authorities each time they transferred from one mosque to another.

Since the beginning of the Russian occupation, UGCC priests continued to report harassment at the hands of Russian Federation intelligence agencies and local pro-Russian militias. The UGCC was unable to operate as an independent church and could only operate through a diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. Priests, along with all other peninsula residents, were pressured to take Russian citizenship. Non-Russian priests without residency could only spend 90 days in Crimea and had to leave for another 90 days, disrupting religious work.

The Mejlis, the representative body of Crimean Tatars, said the Russian occupation government created the Tauride Muftiate in 2014 as an alternative Muslim leadership group in order to put pressure on the SAMC. As a result of this pressure, the Mejlis stated the SAMC was forced to cooperate with Russian occupation authorities and had to represent the views of the occupying power. Otherwise, they said the occupation government would replace the SAMC with the Tauride Muftiate, which they stated was under the direction of the Russian intelligence services. Mejlis leaders said the SAMC no longer represented the

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views of its worshipers, and they planned to register an independent SAMC on Ukrainian controlled territory.

UOC-KP priests stated that they were under constant surveillance by Russian authorities, who ordered them to provide lists of parishioners, forced them to sign documents affirming their identities and church membership, and accused them of being members of right-wing Ukrainian groups such as Right Sector and Svoboda.

Social media reported that Crimean Tatar Muslims in Bakhchisarai were forbidden from assembling to celebrate Eid al-Fitr in July, in order to prevent large groups from gathering.

The authorities utilized Russian laws banning “extremism,” which allowed officials to prohibit the activity of a religious association and to confiscate religious materials, to target Crimean Tatar communities and Muslim institutions. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

On May 5, authorities denied the Muslim community in Stary Krym permission to conduct burials at a recently completed cemetery. The occupation authorities stated the property did not meet health standards, but Crimean Tatars said it was an attempt to discriminate against their religion and ethnicity.

According to human rights monitors, on August 14, Russian occupation authorities set up video cameras to monitor the exterior of the mosque in the village of Ay-Vasil in order to “combat extremism.”

According to media sources, on February 20, occupation authorities seized 6,000 copies of the Quran sent from Turkey to Kerch.

According to human rights monitors, Russian occupation authorities closed the madrassah in Kolchugino in September because it was unable to register as a religious institution. For the 2015-2016 academic year, four other madrassahs run by the SAMC Muftiate remained closed. An “education ministry” official said no religious organizations had applied for a license to run a religious education program under Russian law; such licenses were not required until September 2016.

The UOC-KP stated that Russian occupation authorities made it difficult for them to operate by artificially raising rents and preventing the Church from leasing

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property. Russian occupation authorities increased the rent for the UOC-KP's cathedral in Simferopol to several thousand dollars a month. According to UOC-KP Archbishop Kliment, Russian occupation authorities forced property owners to break leases with the UOC-KP. As a result, parishes in Saky, Krasnoperekopsk, and Kerch were forced to close. He also reported that the occupation authorities broke a lease with the UOC-KP in Sevastopol without due process or notice. Only nine of 15 churches remained functioning, leading to crowding in the churches that were open.

On January 30, the “prime minister” of Crimea issued an antiterrorism decree defining as a potential terrorist any member of a “nontraditional religious organization.”

On October 9, the occupation authorities stated that Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemilev was recruiting volunteers to join the Da'esh (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Jemilev denied this and stated Russian occupation authorities made the claim to justify an extensive crackdown on the Crimean Tatar community.

According to human rights groups, Russian occupation authorities labeled the Mejlis as a radical Muslim organization in order to restrict the rights of Crimean Tatars. For example, on October 9, Ruslan Balbec, a “deputy prime minister”, said the Mejlis was recruiting Crimean Tatars to fight in Syria as part of Da'esh.

Roman Catholic churches continued to operate but as a diocese directly under the authority of the Vatican, according to the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church had difficulty in staffing parishes, as many of its priests were Polish or Ukrainian and had to register as foreign residents, which allowed them to stay in Crimea for only 90 days at a time. In February only five priests remained on the peninsula. Priests and members reported harassment by Russian occupation authorities. According to press reports, a Polish priest was fined for performing religious work on a tourist visa.

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

According to religious groups and human rights monitors, Russian media engaged in a campaign to create suspicion and fear among certain religious groups, especially Crimean Tatar Muslims, who were accused of links to radical Islamic groups engaged in terrorism. Russian media also depicted the UOC-KP and

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UGCC as “fascists” for supporting the Ukrainian government and opposing the Russian occupation.

According to media reports, Rustem Seitov, a Crimean Tatar and Muslim, was forbidden by his employer from performing daily prayers at work. The “ombudsman for human rights” for Crimea refused to take action on his behalf.

Crimean Tatars reported attacks on religious buildings and institutions. They reported police either refused to investigate such crimes or were slow to do so. On April 26, unknown persons threw Molotov cocktails at a mosque in the village of Skalyste, setting it on fire. On September 17, unknown persons threw bricks at a mosque in the Zavit-Leninsky District. On July 25, vandals damaged a Muslim cemetery in Otuz. The status of any investigation is unknown.

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

The U.S. government publicly called attention to religious abuses committed by Russian forces and occupation authorities in Crimea, particularly condemning the use of “extremism laws” to search, harass, and intimidate religious congregations, especially those of Muslim Crimean Tatars. Embassy officials also publicly condemned efforts to intimidate Christian minorities.

Embassy and U.S. government officials were unable to visit Crimea following its occupation by the Russian Federation. Embassy officers met in other parts of Ukraine with Muslim and Christian leaders whose congregations were affected by the actions of the occupying authorities to listen to their concerns and reassure them of U.S. support for their right to practice their religious beliefs.