

SLOVENIA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and the right of individuals to express their religious beliefs in public and private. It declares all religious communities shall enjoy equal rights and prohibits the incitement of religious hatred or intolerance. The law does not require religious groups to register with the government to engage in religious activities, but registration is necessary for religious groups to obtain status as legal entities, preferential tax treatment, and social benefits. Representatives of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) visited the country in October to continue talks with the government on the remaining small number of unresolved claims for restitution affecting the country's Jewish community. The Constitutional Court continued its consideration of whether the law requiring the stunning of animals prior to slaughter violated the religious freedom of certain groups, but made no ruling.

Construction continued in Ljubljana on the country's first mosque with an anticipated opening in 2018. Unknown individuals vandalized the site several times. Unknown individuals also vandalized the St. Nicholas Catholic Cathedral in Ljubljana. Religious communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the government all issued statements condemning the vandalism and calling for greater tolerance and respect for diversity.

U.S. embassy officers continued to meet regularly with government officials responsible for upholding the constitutional commitment to religious freedom, including the Ministry of Culture's (MOC) Office for Religious Communities, to discuss interfaith dialogue, progress on the construction of the Ljubljana mosque, vandalism at religious sites, and the status of the Constitutional Court case. Embassy officers also continued to hold discussions with religious leaders on the protection of the rights of religious groups. The U.S. Ambassador met with Mufti Nedžad Grabus, leader of the country's Muslim community, and toured the construction site of the country's new mosque and Islamic center, following which the Ambassador and Mufti Grabus made statements supporting religious tolerance and deploring the attempts to desecrate the site.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2002 census, the most recent available, 58 percent of

the population is Roman Catholic, 23 percent “other or unspecified,” 2 percent Muslim, 2 percent Orthodox Christian, and 1 percent “other Christian.” In addition, 3 percent of the population is classified as “unaffiliated,” and 10 percent selected no religion. The Jewish community estimates its size 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 right of individuals to express their beliefs in public and private. It declares all religious communities shall enjoy equal rights and provides for the separation of religion and state. The constitution states everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of their religion; it also prohibits the incitement of religious discrimination and the inflammation of religious hatred and intolerance.

The law states individuals have the right to freely select a religion; the freedom of religious expression or rejection of expression; the right (alone or in a group, privately or publicly) to express their religious beliefs freely in church, through education, religious ceremonies or in other ways; and the right not to be forced to become a member or to remain a member of a religious group, nor to attend or not attend worship services or religious ceremonies. In addition, the law states an individual has the right to refuse to comply with legal duties and requirements that contradict the individual’s religious beliefs, provided such refusal does not limit the rights and freedoms of other persons.

The law states churches and other religious communities must register to obtain status as legal entities, but the law does not restrict the religious activities of religious groups regardless of whether they register with the government. According to the law, the rights of religious groups include autonomy in selecting their legal 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 interconfessional organizations within the country or abroad; the 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 rights of registered religious groups as recognized legal entities include the eligibility for rebates on value-added taxes, government co-financing of social security for clergy, and the authorization to request social benefits for their religious workers.

To register legally with the government, a religious group must submit an application to the MOC providing proof it has at least 10 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents; the name of the group in Latin letters, which must be clearly distinguishable from the names of other religious groups; the group's address in the country; a copy of its official seal to be used in legal transactions; and payment of a 22.66 euro (\$23.88) administrative tax. The group 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. If a group wishes to apply for government cosponsorship of social security for clergy members, it must show it has at least 1,000 members for every clergy member.

The government may only refuse the registration of a religious group if the group does not provide the required application materials in full, or if the MOC determines the group is a "hate group" – an organization engaging in hate crimes as defined by the penal code.

The MOC's Office for Religious Communities is responsible by law for determining the status of churches and other religious communities. The MOC establishes and manages the procedures for registration; issues documents related to the legal status of registered communities; distributes funds allocated in the government's budget for religious activities; organizes discussions and gatherings of religious communities to ensure religious freedom; and provides information to religious groups about the legal provisions and regulations relating to their activities.

In accordance with the law, citizens may apply for the return of property nationalized between 1945 and 1963. Monetary compensation may be provided to former owners who cannot be compensated in-kind; for example, monetary compensation is authorized if state institutions are using the property for an official state purpose or public service such as education or health care.

According to the constitution, parents have the right to provide their children with a religious upbringing in accordance with the parents' beliefs. The government requires all public schools to include education on world religions in their curricula, with instruction provided by school teachers. The government allows churches and religious groups to provide religious education in their faiths in both private and public schools and preschools, on a voluntary basis outside of school hours.

The law also mandates Holocaust education in schools. This instruction focuses on the history of the Holocaust inside and outside of the country. A booklet published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is used as part of the Holocaust education curriculum to create awareness of the history of Jews and anti-Semitism in Europe before World War II and of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust. The booklet emphasizes the responsibility of everyone to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

Individuals have the right to file complaints with the Office of the Ombudsman for the Protection of Human Rights about abuses of religious freedom committed by national or local authorities. The ombudsman's office may forward these complaints to the state prosecutor's office, which then determines if an indictment should be issued or if further investigation is needed, or directly to the court whereupon the complaints are considered formal.

The law requires that animals be stunned prior to slaughter.

The penal code's definition of hate crimes includes publicly provoking religious hatred and diminishing the significance of the Holocaust. Punishment for these offenses is imprisonment for up to two years, or, if the crime involves coercion or endangerment of security – defined as a serious threat to life and limb, desecration, or damage to property – imprisonment for up to five years. If an official abusing the power of his or her position commits these offenses, the punishment may be increased to imprisonment for up to five years. Members of groups that engage in these activities in an organized and premeditated way – hate groups – also may receive a punishment of up to five years in prison.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Representatives from the WJRO visited the country in October for continued talks with the government regarding the remaining small number of unresolved claims for restitution affecting the country's Jewish community. As of the end of the year, no agreement had been reached on these remaining claims.

The Constitutional Court continued its review of the law requiring the stunning of animals prior to slaughter to determine if it violated the religious freedom provisions of the constitution, pursuant to a complaint filed by a Muslim group. The court had not issued a decision as of the end of the year.

In a speech to parliament on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Speaker of the National Assembly Milan Brglez stated actions, not words alone, were needed to prevent a repeat of the horrors of the Holocaust.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Construction continued in Ljubljana on the country's first mosque, expected to open in 2018. In January and February unknown individuals vandalized the site with pigs' heads and blood. The government, NGOs, and religious communities issued statements condemning the desecration and calling for greater tolerance and respect for diversity.

Unknown individuals vandalized the St. Nicholas Catholic Cathedral in Ljubljana with graffiti in March. The country's imams joined others in issuing a statement condemning the cathedral's desecration and saying there was a need to increase mutual trust, coexistence, and respect.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers continued to meet regularly with government officials responsible for upholding the constitutional commitment to religious freedom, including the MOC's Office for Religious Communities, to discuss interfaith dialogue, progress on construction of the Ljubljana mosque, vandalism at religious sites, and the status of the Constitutional Court case.

Embassy officers continued to meet regularly with representatives of all major religious groups to discuss the protection of the rights of religious groups. In

February the U.S. Ambassador met with Mufti Grabus and visited the construction site of the new Ljubljana mosque and cultural center. During the visit, the Ambassador and Mufti Grabus issued statements condemning the desecration incidents at the site. The Ambassador also stated all religious groups should have the right to practice their faiths peacefully and expressed support for the mufti's efforts to promote religious tolerance.