

# **SLOVENIA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides individuals with freedom 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 to registered religious groups. The government established a council to promote dialogue with religious communities, and the council met for the first time in November. By year's end, the government resolved the majority of restitution cases involving religious groups, although a small number of claims affecting the Jewish community remained open. The World Jewish Restoration Organization (WJRO) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) each named an expert to discuss individual heirless properties on a case-by-case basis. The Constitutional Court considered whether a ban on animal slaughter violated religious freedom.

The Islamic Community laid the foundation stone for the country's first mosque and started construction.

The U.S. embassy held discussions with the government and religious leaders on religious freedom issues, including protection of the rights of religious groups, interfaith dialogue, government policy, and progress on the mosque and cultural center. The Ambassador met with leaders of religious communities, and the embassy hosted an iftar to foster dialogue and demonstrate support for religious tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2 million (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2002 census, the most recent available, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 23 percent is "other or unspecified," 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 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**

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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 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 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 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. A group which engages in these activities in an organized and premeditated way – a hate group – also receives a higher penalty.

Religious groups and the activities of religious groups are unrestricted, regardless of whether they register with the government. Religious groups must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be considered legal entities and be eligible for rebates on value-added taxes and government co-financing of social security for clergy. Registered religious groups have the right to request financial support from the government to pay for salaries and social benefits for their religious workers.

To register, religious groups must submit an application to the Office for Religious Communities providing proof they fulfill the government's requirements: at least

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10 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents; the name of the religious group in Latin letters, which must be clearly distinguishable from the name 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 (\$24.66) 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 if it does not provide the required application materials in full, or if the Office for Religious Communities determines it is a hate group. Forty-nine religious groups are registered. If a group wishes to apply for government co-sponsorship of social security for clergy members, it must show it has at least 1,000 members for every clergy member.

The law requires that animals be stunned prior to slaughter.

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.

The Denationalization Act of 1991 established 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, during and after World War II. 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, if state institutions are using the property for an official state purpose or public service such as education or health care.

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 of the country. A booklet published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is used as part of the Holocaust education curriculum.

### **Government Practices**

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The MOJ no longer tracked data for remaining unsettled restitution cases. The WJRO continued to negotiate with the government regarding a small number of outstanding claims for restitution affecting the country's Jewish community. Representatives from the organization visited the country in May and continued talks on this issue. The WJRO and the MOJ have each named an expert to discuss individual heirless properties on a case-by-case basis.

The government continued to allow churches and religious groups to provide religious education in both private and state-subsidized schools and preschools, on a voluntary basis outside of school hours.

The Constitutional Court reviewed the law on animal slaughter to determine if it violated religious freedom but there was no decision by year's end.

In August, in stated recognition of the Jewish minority, the government declared the Maribor Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in Slovenia and one of the oldest in Europe, a cultural monument of national importance.

The government established a religious dialogue council to promote communication with religious communities; the council met for the first time in November. During the inaugural meeting, the council agreed to promote transparency between religious groups and the government. It also established that all of its meetings and findings would be open to the public.

In January the National Museum of Contemporary History sponsored an exhibition featuring tarot cards painted by a concentration camp survivor depicting life in World War II concentration camps. The exhibit also marked the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The museum continued a project to record testimonies of concentration camp survivors.

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

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

The Islamic Community laid the foundation stone of the country's first mosque, and work on the project progressed. Mufti Nedžad Grabus stated that construction of the mosque was confirmation that Muslims are part of society.

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### 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 to discuss government policy.

In July the embassy hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing together leaders from the country's Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities to bolster links and encourage further interfaith dialogue. Leaders of the various faiths agreed on the importance of religious tolerance and mutual understanding.

The Ambassador met with Mufti Nedžad Grabus, Rabbi Ariel Heddad, and Roman Catholic Archbishop Stanislav Zore to discuss issues critical to each group. The discussions focused on the need to avoid religious stereotypes, maintain civility in interfaith dialogue, and focus on common interests.