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Serbia and Montenegro (includes Kosovo)

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The report for [Kosovo](#) is appended at the end of this report.

The constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro provide for freedom of religion, and the state union Government generally respected this right in practice. There was no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the majority Serbian Orthodox Church received some preferential consideration. The constituent republics of the state union handled most religious affairs. The constitution and laws of the republic of Montenegro provided for freedom of religion and generally respected this right in practice. The republic of Serbia adopted a discriminatory law on religion that creates an inequality among religious groups. President Tadic indicated that he would seek to amend the law which, in its current version, would impede the free practice of religion in Serbia.

During the period covered by this report, Montenegro's government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion in its republic. However, government respect for religious freedom in Serbia deteriorated over the period because of the problematic law on religion.

There were some instances of discrimination and acts of societal violence directed against representatives of religious minorities in Serbia and Montenegro. The Jewish community in Serbia reported continuing incidents of anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitic books, during the period covered by this report; however, there were fewer incidents directed at religious groups overall than during the previous reporting period. Leaders of minority religious communities often reported acts of vandalism, hate speech, physical attacks, and negative media reports labeling them "sects," "satanists," or "deviants." Police and government officials took some positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism; however, in Serbia, the punishments for perpetrators tended to be lenient.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the state union and republic governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives meet regularly with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as well as with government representatives to promote respect for religious freedom. During the reporting period, embassy representatives advocated for changes in the laws on religion and restitution that would rectify some of the discriminatory aspects of the legislation. The embassy also assisted in rebuilding administrative offices of the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis that were heavily damaged by fires in March 2004.

Section I. Religious Demography

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has an area of nearly 35,300 square miles and a population of approximately 8,186,000. The predominant faith in the country was Serbian Orthodoxy. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, including most ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins who professed a religion, were Serbian Orthodox. The Muslim faith was the second largest in Serbia and Montenegro, with approximately 5 percent of the population, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and southern Serbia, and Roma located throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Roman Catholics comprised approximately 4 percent of the population and were predominantly ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and ethnic Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants made up approximately 1 percent of the population and included Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, evangelical Christians, members of the Church of Christ, and Pentecostals. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses were also present. Serbia and Montenegro had a small and aging Jewish population numbering between 2,000 and 2,400. The remainder of the population professed other faiths or claimed to be atheist. In a 2002 census, 3 percent of Serbian citizens claimed to be nonbelievers or declined to declare a religion. According to Montenegro's 2003 census, almost 70 percent of its population was Orthodox, 21 percent was Muslim, and 4 percent was Catholic.

Approximately one hundred foreign missionaries from several faiths operated in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and those of the republic of Montenegro provide for freedom of religion, and the governments at these levels generally respected this right in practice. However, the law on religion in Serbia, adopted in April 2006, discriminates among religious groups and requires minority religious groups, including religions that have been previously recognized, to re-register through an invasive and burdensome procedure in order to attain or retain their status as recognized religions.

There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the Montenegrin Republic's constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Roman Catholic Church by name, stating that these and other religions are separate from the state. Serbia's law on religion recognizes seven "traditional" religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic religious community, and the Jewish religious community. The 2005 law on finance also recognizes only these seven religious groups, granting them tax exemptions, although the law was pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the reporting period, and the minister of religion wrote letters to several minority religious groups stating that they would not have to pay taxes.

Serbia has not recognized other Orthodox churches, despite attempts by the Macedonian, Romanian, and Montenegrin Orthodox churches to gain recognition. The new religion law reinforces this unwillingness to recognize them: Article 19 stipulates that the name of a religious organization cannot contain a name or part of a name of an existing registered group. For example, no group including the word "Orthodox" or "Evangelical" in its title could be registered as those are already found in the names of the traditional churches.

Serbia's law on religion was the sixth iteration of a bill that was long under development. Previous versions perpetuated the special status and privileges of the seven traditional communities, but the Government had appeared committed to working with religious communities and the international community to grant privileges to smaller religious groups. However, the sixth version was submitted without adequate opportunity for comment. Key articles of the law that would grant the privileges of the traditional seven to pre-existing religious communities, including many smaller Protestant churches, were inexplicably dropped from the text at the last minute. Religious groups and international organizations who had long been engaged on the issue were not informed of last-minute changes in the draft and were caught unawares by Parliament's passage and the president's subsequent signing of the bill. President Tadic himself expressed reservations about the legislation; he attached a list of his reservations when he signed the bill and acknowledged that the legislation did not conform to international standards.

Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious communities, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission were highly critical of Serbia's religion law. It recognizes the "traditional" seven religious communities, while all other religious groups must now re-register with the Ministry of Religion, which has the discretion to decide whether to grant approval. Many of the religions now required to re-register have been recognized officially as religions in Serbia for over 50 years, and have been present in the republic for as long as 150 years.

The registration requirements, deemed invasive by the Council of Europe, include submitting names, identity numbers and signatures of members; proof that the religious group meets the threshold of 0.001 percent of adult citizens of Serbia (approximately sixty-five persons); the group's statute and summary of its religious teachings, ceremonies, religious goals, and basic activities; and information on sources of funding.

Montenegro has no legislation to regulate the work of religious communities.

The Orthodox Church also received preferential treatment beyond tax exemptions: the Serbian Government continued to collect money from postal charges for construction of a large Serbian Orthodox Church and to subsidize salaries for Serbian Orthodox clergy working in Kosovo and internationally.

The Serbian Government required all religious organizations to submit annual financial statements as businesses. On March 2, 2005, Novi Sad's commercial court fined Serbia's Baptist Union \$308 (20,000 dinars) and its vice president, Zarko Djordjevic, \$62 (4,000 dinars) for failure to comply, but suspended the fines because the Baptist Union had been unaware of the requirement. In 2004, the Adventist Church was fined \$633 (500 euros) for the same offense. In 2005, legal proceedings were underway against the Adventist Church and the financial director of the Serbian Orthodox diocese of Raska/Prizren for failure to submit annual financial statements; the defendants submitted their paperwork and charges were dropped.

Religious education in Serbian primary and secondary schools continued during the period covered by this report. According to a 2001 Serbian government regulation, students are required either to attend classes from one of the seven "traditional" religious communities or to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education remained approximately equal to the proportion registering for civic education courses during the reporting period. Some Protestant leaders and NGOs in Serbia and in Montenegro continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools. In Montenegro, religious studies have not been introduced as a subject in primary and secondary schools.

Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Easter are public holidays in Serbia and Montenegro. These holidays do not

negatively affect other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, police response to vandalism and other societal acts against religious groups rarely resulted in arrests, indictments, or other resolution of incidents. Some government officials continued to criticize minority religious groups as "sects," "satanists" and "deviants." In addition, government actions have made it difficult for Orthodox churches not recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church to operate in Serbia, including the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

Local authorities ordered the demolition of a Romanian Orthodox church built on private, rural land (which does not require building permits) in the village of Malajnica, Serbia. The authorities evidently acted because the local Serbian Orthodox clergy had not granted approval for the church as a matter of Orthodox Church rules and jurisdiction. The case was pending in the Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period, and the church remained standing. Local authorities also threatened to charge the church for the demolition of its own building.

There is no chaplain service in the armed forces. Although local Serbian Orthodox priests are the only clergy offering religious services at armed forces chapels, members of the armed forces of other faiths can attend religious services outside their barracks and spend important religious holidays with their families. Because of cost considerations, the army has not implemented plans to meet Muslim soldiers' dietary requirements, which would require separate kitchens.

In Montenegro, the Reis of the Islamic Community noted that Islamic prisoners and army conscripts have difficulty in receiving proper foods, i.e. meals without pork.

The town of Leskovac, Serbia, has a municipal Council for the Prevention of Addictions and Religious Sects. The Council identified Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, the Evangelical Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and "satanists" as sects and promoted propaganda against them.

There was limited progress in Serbia during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized religious property. The Government reported that it was near to completing a register of seized religious property. As a temporary measure, a few religious communities were granted free use of some facilities that had been seized from them. At the close of the reporting period, Parliament was considering a draft law on restitution of religious property in Serbia. This draft law would recognize claims for religious property confiscated in 1945 or later; some religious groups—particularly the Jewish and Islamic communities, who lost land prior to 1945—expressed opposition to this benchmark.

The Belgrade Islamic community reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city. Religious organizations generally continued to report difficulty obtaining permission from local authorities in Serbia to build new worship facilities.

Montenegro's 2004 Law on Restitution treats religious property as it treats privately owned property. In Montenegro, the Serbian Orthodox Church claimed property comprising a significant part of the Republic's territory.

In 2004, the Government of Montenegro built a temporary waste facility on a site in Lovanja. A claim filed by Catholic priest Don Branko Zbutega that the Catholic Church held title to some of the land was rejected, and a countersuit filed against him by the Montenegrin Government was upheld. Zbutega appealed the \$2,510 (2,000 euros) fine imposed on him in the case. The court trial regarding the ownership of Lovanja was pending; Zbutega died in April 2006.

The Montenegrin Government challenged a decision by the Ministry of Defense of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to transfer military property to the majority Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003. Montenegrin officials claim the transfer was an illegal attempt to prevent the Republican Government from obtaining this property when the federal state was dissolved and replaced by the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. The case remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report, largely because of a moratorium on most transfers of military property.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

Jewish leaders in Serbia reported continued incidents of anti-Semitism, including small-circulation anti-Semitic books

and Internet postings. The release of new books or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature often led to an increase in hate mail and other expressions of anti-Semitism. These same sources associated anti-Semitism with anti-Western and anti-globalization sentiments, as well as with nationalism.

On July 10, 2005, graffiti appeared in Smederevo's main square that read, "Beware of the Jewish influence on government and the private sector," "Inflation comes from the Jews," "Death to Zionism," and "Riot against Jews," and included swastikas and Nazi slogans. Smederevo police arrested two suspects and a court sentenced them to thirty days in prison for inciting national, religious, and racial hatred. On July 11, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on a Novi Sad synagogue; the perpetrators remained unidentified.

On September 3, 2005, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on a Novi Sad synagogue during the celebration of Days of Jewish Culture in Serbia. On September 5, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared again in Smederevo.

On November 18, 2005, a guest on the television show "Problem" alleged that Jews knew in advance about the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. The guest also made disparaging remarks about Jews in Serbia.

On February 12, 2006, graffiti appeared on a monument in Nis saying "Holocaust-the Jewish lie that governs the world," along with nationalistic slogans such as "Serbia for the Serbs."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the NGO Center for Tolerance and Inter-Religious Relations, the amount of anti-sect reporting in the media declined slightly during the reporting period. The number of attacks against religious minorities also generally declined during the period.

While Serbia's law on religion discriminates against minority religious groups, the seven "traditional" religious groups recognized by the law reported a general improvement in their status during the reporting period. These groups welcomed the new law on religion as a step that, while imperfect, is in their view a positive first step toward improving interreligious relations.

Police continued to guard the Belgrade mosque since it was attacked in March 2004. They also provided security in front of the Belgrade synagogue.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

While relations between members of different religious groups were generally good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and in some cases it was difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin.

Minority religious communities in Serbia continued to experience problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. Most attacks involved spray-painted graffiti; thrown rocks, bricks, or bottles; or vandalized tombstones.

On July 5, 2005, several tombstones at the Catholic graveyard in Srpski Itebej near Zrenjanin were severely damaged and leveled to the ground. On July 15, unknown perpetrators set fire to the door of the Adventist church in Rakovica, near Belgrade. On July 21, windows at the Backa Palanka Adventist church were broken; similar attacks at the same place occurred August 13 and August 21. Police charged a group of suspects with property damage.

On August 12, 2005, unknown perpetrators broke windows and painted graffiti on the Adventist church in Sivic. On August 27, windows were broken at the regional headquarters of the Adventist Church in Novi Sad. On September 7, dozens of graves at the Sencansko Catholic graveyard in Subotica were desecrated. Subotica's mayor condemned the attacks.

Unknown attackers broke stained glass windows at the Catholic church in Smederevo in early January 2006 and again on March 24. On April 20, the stained glass windows at the Catholic church in Kragujevac also suffered damage from attacks.

While harassment of religious minorities was generally limited to crimes against property and occasional verbal abuse, physical attacks on persons occurred in Serbia during the reporting period. On July 11, 2005, three unknown assailants stabbed a Hare Krishna in the chest while he was walking on the street late at night; according to media reports, the assailants told him he should be burned at the stake. Between July and November 2005, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were physically attacked on four separate occasions. Although the victims reported the incidents to the Belgrade police, providing video footage of one attack, the police told them it would be difficult to apprehend the perpetrators since they were minors.

In 2004, police arrested 110 persons for an attack on the Belgrade mosque in March 2004. In April 2005, one of these persons was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in connection with the attack. A trial of ten other persons indicted in the attack was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The Serbian Government repaired the outside of the mosque but had not repaired the interior. The Government also pledged funds toward repair of other buildings on the mosque compound, but provided only a portion of the amount promised. The U.S. Embassy earmarked \$60,000 for the reconstruction of the administrative building, including its school facilities and a computer center, and began work in January 2006.

In July 2005, a municipal court convicted and sentenced eight persons to spend three to five months in prison for the March 2004 burning of the Islam-Aga mosque in the southern Serbian city of Nis, the first such conviction for anti-Muslim violence from that period. Muslim leaders criticized the sentences as too lenient. Numerous police present at the court building at the time of the trial did not intervene when the defendants' followers chanted "Death to Muslims." Nis authorities provided \$4,688 (300,000 dinars) toward repair of the Nis mosque. The U.S. Embassy began plans to fund the design and engineering work, estimated at \$15,000 to \$20,000, to build a community center at the site of the burned mosque.

Anti-sect propaganda decreased slightly in the Serbian press, which labeled smaller, multiethnic Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—and some other smaller religious groups as "sects" and claimed they were dangerous. Religious leaders noted that instances of vandalism often occurred soon after press reports on sects. On August 18, 2005, the Belgrade daily *Vecernje Novosti* published an article attacking the Oasis Pentecostal Romany children's center in Jagodina, calling it "sectarian" since it did not perform Orthodox rites. In the article, Orthodox priests claimed the center was a "sect, since it is obvious that it is a religious organization that rebaptizes children." On September 7, *Pancevacke Novine* weekly in Pancevo denigrated members of the Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses communities as "false benefactors who under a mask are offering secrets of 'the way of happiness and body' and bring their victims to complete disaster, loss of their houses and apartments, friends, family and almost sanity."

In Montenegro, the Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox communities coexisted within the same towns and often used the same municipally owned properties to conduct worship services. Tensions continued between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. These tensions were largely political, stemming from Montenegro's periodic drive for independence that started in 1997 and increased occasionally with the approach of the May 2006 referendum on independence. The two churches continued to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention was not marked by significant violence.

The Montenegrin Institute for Protection of Monuments and Cultural Heritage accused the Serbian Orthodox Church of "counterfeiting" Montenegro's cultural heritage at several locations (Church of the Holy Trinity, Ostrog Monastery, Beska Church, etc.) by performing illegal restoration and conservation works, some of which altered the content of some ancient artwork and frescoes. The state directorate responsible for the prevention of illegal building prohibited several construction projects on church facilities run by the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, Serbian Orthodox clergymen ignored inspections several times, claiming to be solely responsible for the Serbian Orthodox church property in Montenegro. In practice, it was not clear who controlled construction and restoration of church buildings in Montenegro.

On January 6-8, 2006, at their third formal conference in Cetinje, representatives of the orthodox churches of Georgia, Ukraine, Italy, Bulgaria, and Montenegro adopted a Declaration of Unanimous Support to the Montenegrin Autocephalous Church. The Serbian Orthodox Church described the event as "the meeting of godless people."

From February 14 to 17, 2006, the Government of Montenegro organized an international convention of orthodoxy in Montenegro's historic capital, Cetinje, which was seen as an effort by the Government to restore good relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro on the eve of the May 21 referendum on independence.

In June 2005, the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the assistance of a Serbia and Montenegro army helicopter, erected a church on the peak of Mount Rumija, near the city of Bar, without a valid permit. The Serbian Orthodox Church was accused of violating a century-long tradition of good interethnic relations among the three confessions (Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim) living in Bar. While government authorities announced the "imminent" removal of the church, no actions were taken by the end of the period covered by this report. The Serbian Orthodox Church announced that it would ask for the necessary permits to legalize the church. Serbia and Montenegro Army Chief of Staff Dragan Paskas was relieved of office for allowing the use of the helicopter.

In September 2005, a delegation of prelates from Montenegro, including the leader of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church Mihajlo, Catholic priest Don Branko Zbuteaga, and the previous Reis of the Montenegrin Islamic Community Idris Demirovic, paid homage to the victims of Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with both republics' governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, and continues to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout Serbia and Montenegro.

Embassy officials meet regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

During the reporting period, the embassy began projects to help the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis rebuild facilities that were heavily damaged from the ethnically motivated attacks of March 2004. Embassy officials worked with the Serbian religion minister, leaders of religious communities, international organizations and NGOs, and directly with President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica to advocate changes in the law on religion and the law on restitution of property of religious communities. The embassy also counseled religious groups to report all incidents against their property or adherents to senior government officials, to counter often lackluster response by local police. Embassy officials continued to urge senior government officials to speak out against incidents targeting ethnic minorities (including their places of worship and cemeteries) and to find and punish the perpetrators.

KOSOVO

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. UNMIK and its chief administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), established a civil administration in 1999, following the conclusion of the NATO military campaign that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo. Since that time, the SRSG and UNMIK, with the assistance of the international community, have worked with local leaders to build the institutions and expertise necessary for self-government under UNSCR 1244. UNSCR 1244 also authorized an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) to provide a safe and secure environment.

The UNMIK-promulgated Constitutional Framework for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) in Kosovo provides for freedom of religion, as does UNMIK Regulation 1999/24 on applicable law in Kosovo; UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government generally respected this right in practice. Attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs peaked following the NATO campaign in 1999, and again in March 2004, when violence perpetrated by Kosovo Albanians resulted in the deaths of 19 persons (11 Kosovo Albanians and 8 Kosovo Serbs), 954 injuries, and widespread property damage, including 30 Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, cemeteries and more than 900 homes.

Respect for religious freedom increased during the period covered by this report and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Historically, tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb populations have been largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Roman Catholic institutions were not targets. Attacks on Orthodox religious sites significantly decreased after the March 2004 riots, although some minor vandalism occurred during the period covered by this report.

The violent events of March 2004 slowed the transfer of responsibility for the protection of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). KFOR halted the process immediately following the March 2004 riots and increased the number of checkpoints near Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, and patrimonial sites; however, the transfer process has since continued. For example, KFOR relaxed its two fixed checkpoints on either side of the main road to Decani monastery on April 27, 2006. Kosovo leaders, with the acceptance of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence, reconstructed all but a handful of houses damaged, and funded and finished preliminary assessments on thirty religious sites damaged in March 2004.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government has contributed to the continued safekeeping of Islamic manuscripts, refurbished through U.S. government funds. After six years of international community assistance, the PISG must still fully address interethnic reconciliation and make further progress on implementing the "Standards for Kosovo," which help provide the framework for establishing a multiethnic, sustainable democratic society. In October 2005, the U.N. Security Council endorsed the U.N. secretary general's intention to begin status negotiations for Kosovo, which include discussions on the protection of cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo. As a member of the Contact Group and contributor to the NATO-led Kosovo Force, the United States remains fully involved in all aspects of peacekeeping and democratization in Kosovo. The U.S. government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites. In December 2004, the SRSG and KFOR commander signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which specifies response mechanisms and cooperation between the KPS and KFOR to maintain order. Contingency plans for riot control have been revised to include an operational presence in municipalities and permanent contact among local police, UNMIK, communities, village leaders, and local authorities.

Over the course of the period covered by this report, the UNMIK police community policing initiative completed phased deployment of 350 international police officers to 30 locations in the region that are considered sites for potential return of displaced persons and those inhabited by minority communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

Kosovo has an area of approximately 4,211 square miles and a population of approximately 2 million, although the last

credible census was taken in the 1980s. Islam was the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population, the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and some in the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community, although religion was not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric was largely absent from public discourse, mosque attendance was low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress and culture were minimal. The present Serb population in Kosovo, which was estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 persons, was largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians were Roman Catholic. Protestants made up less than 1 percent of the population and had thirty-six churches and small populations in most of Kosovo's cities, the largest concentration located in Kosovo's capital of Pristina. Approximately forty persons from two families in Prizren had some Jewish roots, but there were no synagogues or Jewish institutions. Estimates of atheists or those who did not practice any religion were difficult to determine and/or largely unreliable.

Foreign clergy actively practiced and proselytized. There were Muslim, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. Roman Catholic communities were concentrated around Catholic churches in Prizren and Pristina. UNMIK estimated that seventy-one faith-based or religious organizations, which listed their goals as providing humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach, worked in Kosovo. In March, UNMIK transferred the tracking of such organizations to the Ministry of Public Services, but the ministry had not provided any new information by the end of the period covered by this report.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

In 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo (the "Constitutional Framework"), which established the PISG and replaced the UNMIK-imposed Joint Interim Administrative Structure. Following November 2001 central elections, the 120-member Kosovo Assembly held its inaugural session in late 2001. In 2002, the Assembly selected Kosovo's first president, prime minister, and government. Kosovo's latest government was formed after the Kosovo Assembly elected Fatmir Sejdiu as Kosovo's president on February 10, 2006, and Agim Ceku as Kosovo's prime minister on March 10, 2006. UNMIK had transferred most of the authority authorized by the Constitutional Framework to the PISG, and, while it transferred some competencies to the Ministries of Justice and Interior in February 2006, UNMIK and NATO retained ultimate authority in such areas as security and protection of communities.

Kosovo's Constitutional Framework incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity; UNMIK and the PISG generally respected this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the PISG officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development. UNMIK, as Kosovo's final administrative decision-maker, sought to protect religious freedom in full.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some, but not all, holy days of the Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox religious groups. UNMIK recognizes the major religious Orthodox and Islamic holy days of Orthodox Christmas, Eid-al-Adha, Orthodox Easter Monday, Orthodox Assumption Day, the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and western Christmas.

There are no mandatory registration regulations with regard to religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious organizations must register with the Ministry of Public Services as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious leaders have complained that they should have special status apart from that of NGOs. Protestant evangelical community representatives have complained that they cannot receive documentation proving religious or NGO status in Kosovo because the Ministry of Public Services requires that they be a documented entity for at least five years before they can be legally registered as an NGO.

In response to the complaint that religious communities should have special status other than that of NGOs, the Kosovo Prime Minister's Office established a working group to draft a law on religious freedom and the legal status of religious communities in 2003. The group consisted of representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic religious groups in Kosovo; Serbian Orthodox representatives declined to participate. Nonetheless, the working group continued to provide Serbian Orthodox representatives with drafts of the law.

On May 20, 2005, the Kosovo Assembly passed the first reading of the draft law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Religious Communities in Kosovo, which would further protect the rights of religious communities and individuals.

Before the draft law's first reading in May 2005, the Islamic community and Roman Catholic leadership proposed new amendments to this draft, which included: labeling the Islamic community the "only representative" of Kosovo Muslims; establishing a ministry of religion; and exempting religious communities from paying utilities. The assembly committee did not add these provisions to the draft law. After the first reading in the Assembly, the law went back to parliamentary committee for further debate. The Islamic community lobbied local political leadership for inclusion of amendments which continue to require a minimum number of adherents before a religious group can be registered as a "special

status" religion and in a "special relationship with the Government," which Protestant religious groups in Kosovo believe would pave the way for the teaching of religion in public schools. In December 2005, a group of religious leaders from the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic community, and the Jewish community (in Serbia), as well as working-level PISG representatives in Vienna, drafted these changes as amendments to the law, but the assembly committee did not add these elements into the law sent to the Government for approval. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Contact Group named this law among three pieces of priority legislation that the PISG is to pass in 2006. The law had not been given a second reading in the assembly at the end of the period covered by this report. The contentious provisions that met with objections from the Protestant community were excluded from the draft law approved by the Kosovo Assembly and would likely be addressed in subsequent legislation. The most recent draft law enshrined the right to believe and worship freely in Kosovo.

In April 2006, ethnic Albanian President Fatmir Sejdiu visited Decani monastery for Orthodox Easter and spoke in Serbian while conversing with the clergy, marking the first time a president of Kosovo received and accepted such an invitation. Veton Surroi, leader of Reform Party Ora (PRO), visited the SOC's Decani monastery twice during the reporting period, in an effort to hear SOC concerns pertaining to Kosovo's final status negotiations. Central and local government officials participated in a landmark interfaith conference hosted by the Pec Patriarchate from May 2 to May 4, 2006, which included a visit to the Decani monastery, a nearby mosque, and a Roman Catholic church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, the PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Kosovo Islamic Community at times publicly alleged that Kosovo lacked genuine religious freedom, citing as examples UNMIK's refusal to provide radio frequencies for an Islamic radio station and the closing of a prayer room in the National Library by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in 2004. The same community also alleged that, although thirty-two acres of municipal land were allocated and the cornerstone was laid August 28, 2005, for a Roman Catholic cathedral in Pristina dedicated to Mother Theresa, a Catholic nun of Albanian ethnicity, the Pristina Municipal Assembly refused its request to allocate space for new mosques for what the Islamic community claimed was a growing Muslim population in Pristina. Some Kosovo Muslim leaders complained that they were not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs with UNMIK.

Kosovo education legislation and regulation provide for a separation between religious and public spheres. In May 2005, a principal suspended a public school teacher for wearing a headscarf to class, citing a provision of Kosovo's law on education which obligates public institutions to adopt a neutral attitude towards religion when providing education. On May 29, Pristina Municipality's Department of Education dismissed the teacher, a decision the Ombudsperson's Institution supported when the investigation revealed the teacher was found to have been proselytizing during class time. A male student filed a complaint with the Ombudsperson's Institution alleging he was expelled from school for wearing a beard; school officials told the Ombudsperson Institution that the student was not expelled, but only prevented from returning to class while he wore a beard. Another case from April 2005, which was under investigation at the end of the reporting period, involved a primary school student who was dismissed from class for wearing a headscarf. A similar case resulted in a June 2004 non-binding opinion from the ombudsperson that the ministry's interpretation should only apply to school teachers and officials, not students. All parties filed petitions with the Ministry of Education and formal complaints with Kosovo's ombudsperson.

Protestants continued to report that they experience discrimination in media access, particularly by the public Radio and Television Kosovo (RTK). Protestants also reported that Decani municipality denied them permission to build a church facility on privately owned land they had purchased, citing negative reaction from local citizens, and that the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning upheld the decision. Decani municipal authorities responded that their donation of time in the shared municipal convention center afforded Protestants adequate space.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On January 17, 2006, the SOC alleged that the Association of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) War Veterans, in cooperation with Gjakova municipality, had erected a monument honoring KLA veterans on church property. On February 2, the SOC announced that UNMIK promised, in cooperation with the PISG, to "work to protect this church property." The monument remained in place at the end of the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, Kosovo political leaders- including government and political party officials-

increasingly called for religious tolerance and participated in milestone interfaith events. Kosovo officials also constructively engaged in several rounds of U.N.-led negotiations this year with Serbian officials to reach agreement as part of the Kosovo status talks on ways to better protect religious and cultural heritage in Kosovo. Talks were ongoing at the end of the period covered by the report.

During a January 6, 2006, visit to the Serb residents in Pristina on Orthodox Christmas, the then-Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi said that Kosovo was not only his home, but the home of all Kosovo's residents, irrespective of ethnicity and religion.

Serbian Orthodox clergy reported constraints on freedom of movement that prohibited adherents from freely attending worship services, but reported that they themselves were able to move freely around Kosovo with little incident. On March 22, 2006, UNMIK Chief Soren Jessen-Petersen and Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu paid a visit to Rahovec municipality. In two separate meetings with members of Serb and Albanian communities, Sejdiu and Jessen-Petersen called on citizens of Rahovec to work together to achieve full human rights for all Kosovars.

On March 28, 2006, Veton Surroi convened the Communities Consultative Council in Durrës, Albania, bringing together political leadership from Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo's other minority communities to openly discuss their ideas for the Kosovo status talks.

On April 19, 2006, the SRSG urged internally displaced persons (IDPs) and IDP associations to participate actively in the ongoing returns efforts. In his meeting with members of IDP associations, the SRSG said that the PISG and UNMIK, in active collaboration with IDP associations and minority groups, had revised the returns manual to ensure direct participation of IDPs themselves in decision-making processes.

One challenge facing the international community and the PISG has been reducing and preventing ethnically motivated attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches and shrines and on the Serbian Orthodox population of Kosovo. Since the riots of March 2004, during which 30 Orthodox religious sites and more than 900 homes and businesses of ethnic minorities were burned or damaged, the number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches has decreased. Members of the PISG and some political leaders, who made efforts to communicate with Kosovo Serbs and Serbian Orthodox officials after the riots and during the period covered by this report, continued to express a public commitment to assist in their return and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed churches.

Prompted by the international community after the March 2004 riots, Kosovo leaders sought to address the concerns of the Serbian Orthodox Church and persons displaced by the violence and agreed to fund and cooperate with local religious officials and international experts in rebuilding the damaged property. On the basis of a Council of Europe damage assessment, the PISG allocated \$5.3 million (4.2 million euros) for the initial phase of the reconstruction of churches and monasteries damaged in the March riots. The PISG completed the first phase of emergency repairs in full cooperation with the SOC during the period covered by this report.

In a May 2006 report to the UNSC, UNMIK stated that most of the criminal cases related to March 2004 riots were handled by the local judiciary: charges were pressed against 426 people, resulting in 217 convictions, 14 acquittals, 89 pending cases, and 106 cases dropped for lack of evidence. International prosecutors conducted forty-four of the most serious riot-related cases, resulting in thirteen convictions, with punishments ranging from suspended sentences to eighteen years in prison for attempted murder.

General crime statistics as reported by UNMIK on May 24, 2006, revealed a decline in potentially ethnically-motivated crimes. Compared to the seventy-two incidents recorded from January to March 2005, nineteen such cases were reported during the same time period in 2006. UNMIK police reported that of the 1,408 Kosovo Serb convoys escorted by the KPS from January to early May 2006, there were only 6 incidents of stone throwing, leading to 5 arrests by the KPS. In response to reports in the Serb media of increasing security concerns among Kosovo Serbs, UNMIK and KPS began twenty-four-hour foot patrols in majority ethnic Serb areas of Kosovo in May 2006.

On May 16, 2006, ethnic Albanian students from a secondary school in Decan municipality, accompanied by the director and four teachers, visited the Decani monastery, marking the first nonofficial visit of ethnic Albanian Kosovo residents to the monastery since the end of the conflict in 1999. Father Sava Janjic welcomed and guided the group through a tour of the site; both sides expressed positive impressions, and Father Sava told the group he would welcome more such visits in the future.

On April 14, 2006, UNMIK, for the third time, renewed a six-month protection zone for 800 hectares surrounding Decani monastery, which prevents commercial development on protected property.

The municipal assembly of Rahovec/Orahovac passed a resolution on June 19, 2006, allowing the monks of Zociste/Zocishte monastery to regularly use their church bell. Until June 19, as directed by German KFOR, the monks rang the bell only for important church holidays.

Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and a large Serbian delegation traveled to Kosovo on June 26-28 to

commemorate the 650th anniversary of the death of King Dusan at the Holy Archangels Monastery in Prizren, and the annual Vidovdan commemoration of the defeat of the Serbs and their allies by the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. The visit, a possible flashpoint, went without incident.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Ethnicity and religion were inextricably linked in Kosovo and made it difficult to determine if societal discrimination and violence were religiously or ethnically motivated. While most Kosovo Albanians identified themselves as Muslim, the designation had more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identified themselves with the SOC, which defined not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the 1999 conflict, some Serbian Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, while others withdrew from constructive discussion. Most Kosovo Serb politicians continued their three-year boycott of participation in government institutions.

Societal violence continued and increased marginally from the last reporting period. Three high-profile killings of ethnic Serbs occurred during the reporting period: on August 27, 2005, two young men were fatally shot while driving, and a third was stabbed in March on the flashpoint bridge separating ethnic Serb majority north Mitrovica municipality from ethnic Albanian majority south Mitrovica. The first crime had not been solved, but police authorities reacted quickly to arrest suspects in the second case, one of whom was released and was awaiting trial. On May 6, 2006, Kosovo Serb media reported that unknown attackers shot at a car driven by Serbian Orthodox priest Srđan Stankovic in Zvecan municipality; UNMIK charged an ethnic Serb Kosovo Police Service officer in connection with the incident for "brandishing a firearm." One other high profile shooting occurred at a gas station; no one had been charged for this incident by the end of the period covered by this report. Although tension between communities remained high, the prevailing crime trend continued to be against property instead of persons. In 2005, however, 57 percent of potential ethnically motivated incidents were assault and intimidation-related, not necessarily property-related offences, as in the previous reporting period. There were some reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian buses and Serbian Orthodox clergy as they traveled outside of their monasteries, and monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly did not use parts of the monasteries' properties because of concerns about safety.

Security concerns continued to affect the Serb community and also affected its freedom to worship, particularly after the March 2004 riots. Some Kosovo Serbs asserted that they were not able to travel freely to practice their faith. Father Sava Janjic of Decani monastery told USOP that, since KFOR stopped escorting non-clergy parishioners to religious sites in April 2005, he noticed a decline in attendance at services. Sava also reported that, when traveling through Kosovo, clergy transit vans were sometimes pelted with stones and verbal insults, although he and his co-religious generally traveled freely and without incident on Kosovo's main highways during the period covered by this report. Father Sava and Bishop Teodosije (Sibalic) of Lipljan both traveled with an escort to USOP on occasion without incident, including on July 1, 2005, for a Fourth of July celebration. On April 21, 2005, KFOR withdrew its last two armored vehicles from the bridge connecting majority Serb-inhabited north Mitrovica and Kosovo Albanian dominated south Mitrovica and, on April 29, 2005, opened twenty-four-hour passage on the bridge; however, following the stabbing incident near the northern side of the bridge, civilian passage was again temporarily halted. KFOR maintained a nearby presence.

Problems at Serbian Orthodox religious sites continued during the period covered by this report, such as an abundance of garbage at a cemetery near the Pec/Peja Patriarchate. Local Serb radio reported on May 12, 2006, that unknown attackers broke newly fitted doors and several new windows added to the SOC's Church of Saint Ilija, in Podujeve/Podujevo municipality, by the PISG as part of the renovation of March 2004 riot-related damage. The SOC told the media that unknown attackers vandalized the Church of the Birth of the Mother of God (Theotokos) in Obiliq/Obilic on June 19, 2006, by taking at least two crosses from the church's domes and a portion of the lead roof. This church was built in 1998, damaged in the March 2004 riots, and placed on the list of sites to be reconstructed using money from the PISG.

The Kosovo Police Service reported on June 20, 2006, that unknown attackers vandalized sixteen tombstones in a Serbian Orthodox cemetery located in the ethnic Serb majority village of Staro Gracko/Starogracke in Lipljan municipality. KFOR had reportedly cordoned off the cemetery on June 9 when visitors discovered a landmine there. Investigations were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. On June 21, Serb media reported that the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Andrew in Podujeve/Podujevo municipality was vandalized as well.

Many of the churches and monasteries burned in the March 2004 riots were constructed in the 14th century and are considered part of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage. Father Sava Janjic provided a comprehensive list of religious sites destroyed or damaged between March 17 and 19, 2004. The list included thirty sites altogether in the following fourteen locations: Prizren, Rahovec, Gjakova, Skenderaj, Peja, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Shtime, Pristina, Fushe Kosove, Vushtrri, Obiliq, Mitrovica, and Podujevo.

Individual donor countries began repairs to several of the seventy-five priority cultural and religious monuments identified at the May 13, 2005, donors' conference in Paris.

In addition, problems continued with the unfinished Serbian Church of Christ the Savior (only the exterior walls stood), located on University of Pristina grounds. During the 1990s, the Serb-dominated administration in Pristina gave the

land on which the church sits to the SOC. In 2003, the Pristina Municipal Assembly passed a resolution to return the land to the university. The UNMIK representative in the Pristina municipal government immediately suspended this decision. In February 2005, a Christian cross attached to the church was damaged. The SRSG recommended that Pristina authorities abandon their September proposal to convert the unfinished church into an entertainment venue, such as a movie theater or an art gallery.

In light of societal violence in Kosovo against properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, UNMIK authorities continued to provide special security measures to protect religious sites and to ensure that members of all religious groups could worship safely. KFOR deployed security contingents at religious sites throughout Kosovo to protect them from further destruction, such as that which had occurred immediately after KFOR's intervention in 1999; however, KFOR gave priority to saving persons' lives rather than property and was unable to stop the burning and destruction of many sites in March 2004. Because of improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions in some areas, KFOR removed static checkpoints from most churches and religious sites, including relaxing checkpoints at Decani monastery, during the period covered by this report, relying instead on patrols by the U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and indigenous Kosovo Police Service (KPS). In most cases, such changes in security measures did not result in a change in the level of safety of, or access to, the religious sites. During the March 2004 riots, KFOR, CIVPOL, and KPS were involved in crowd control and protecting lives and property. The priority was evacuating persons over saving property, even religious property. Immediately following the March riots, the process of transfer of jurisdiction over local police stations from KFOR to CIVPOL and KPS was halted; subsequently, transfer continued, and all thirty-two jurisdictions in Kosovo were under local KPS patrol at the end of the period covered by this report.

Although Protestants previously reported a slight improvement in their situation, they reported suffering more violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report. They reported discrimination through verbal attacks and exclusion from interfaith initiatives by the religious leadership who defended their actions on the grounds that Protestants are not considered a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. They also stated that, while public television station RTK as an institution did not specifically report on the Protestant religion, some individuals within the RTK had a more positive approach. Protestants also reported slight discrimination in schools where school officials occasionally called in parents of pupils to deter their children from being Protestant. Protestants reported that a U.S. citizen pastor was beaten in Decani municipality by a young man opposed to the Protestants' building of a church there. Protestants also reported verbal local opposition to showing a Christian-based movie in villages throughout Kosovo, as well as break-ins at churches and harassment of adherents.

Roman Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but hardly any bilateral contact with the Serbian Orthodox Church leadership. Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox church leadership believed each other to be highly politicized. The Muslim community made similar remarks concerning their relationship with the Roman Catholic leadership and lack of relationship with the Orthodox community. On May 3, 2006, thieves stole thirteen religious paintings from a Catholic church in Letnica village, which was inhabited by ethnic Albanian and Croats. The Pec/Peja Patriarchate hosted Kosovo's first interfaith conference in two years from May 2 to 4, 2006. Participants from Islamic, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant religious communities, diplomatic liaison offices, UNMIK, and members of the PISG's central and local governance structures discussed religious freedom; visited a Roman Catholic church, a mosque, and Peja/Pec's Orthodox church, accompanied by regional municipal leadership; visited Decani monastery; and, accompanied by ethnic Albanian Decan/Decani mayor Nazmi Selmanaj, walked together to the mosque in the city center. The common statement released by the religious leaders committed the group to hold regular meetings to intensify interreligious dialogue and cooperation, to promote the returns process of all displaced persons, and to engage in the process of drafting religious freedom legislation. Norwegian Church Aid hosted the May 2006 conference to promote peace and dialogue among religious groups. The Islamic community offered to host the next meeting in October 2006.

The withdrawal of Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK administration through UNSCR 1244 resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population, and a cessation of attacks on their mosques and religious sites.

Islamic, some local Orthodox, and Roman Catholic leaders have attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the U.N. Special Envoy for the Kosovo status talks, UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, and has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Kosovo. U.S. officials also maintained close contacts and met regularly with religious leaders of the Serbian Orthodox, Islamic, Roman Catholic, and Protestant communities to discuss their concerns and to push for interfaith dialogue. A delegation of Serbian Orthodox officials formally visited U.S. government institutions in the United States from March 15 to 22, 2006.

U.S. officials continued to urge dialogue between members of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and ethnic Albanian members of the PISG. Officials from the United States met frequently with the heads of major religious communities. In contrast to previous reporting periods, United States Office Pristina personnel attended Serbian

Orthodox holiday services. U.S. officials continued to support UNMIK and the PISG in rebuilding religious buildings damaged in the interethnic riots of March 2004. Officials from the United States met frequently with the heads of the major religious communities, provided funding to preserve Ottoman-era transcripts in the Gazi Medhmed Pasha library, and granted \$1 million to UNESCO's large-scale effort to preserve cultural heritage in the country.

The United States is involved actively in UNMIK, whose goal is to secure peace, facilitate the return of the displaced, lay the foundations for democratic self-government, and foster respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion.

U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and guarded religious sites. U.S. KFOR was credited by local SOC officials with preventing the situation from further escalation in their sector during the March 2004 riots, and they increased their presence within the sector they patrol.

The U.S. government funded the remainder of a survey of Islamic manuscripts in Kosovo to help the local Islamic community preserve its religious heritage.

The U.S. Department of State funds a U.N. international police (CIVPOL) advisor in Pristina and provided \$40 million (31.86 million euros) to support KPS and CIVPOL. KPS and CIVPOL have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in the country.

The U.S. Department of State provides \$3.5 million in funding for returns programs for Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians, and other minority communities.

In the wake of the March 2004 interethnic violence, U.S. officers met with Islamic, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic authorities to discuss ways of supporting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. Many high-level U.S. government and military officials continued to visit the country in conjunction with the final status negotiation process and meet with both political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconstruction and progress toward a multiethnic Kosovo. The U.S. Office also urged the Government to reconstruct Serb homes quickly and allow UNESCO to take the lead on reconstruction of destroyed and damaged religious sites in the country.

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