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2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ukraine

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In February 2014, Russian military forces invaded Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula. 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 purported annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and considers Crimea a part of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia-led forces also occupied parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts (regions), which latter created the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic” and “Donetsk People’s Republic.” The United States does not recognize these so-called “republics.”

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and provides for “the separation of church and religious organizations from the state.” By law, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship. A new law, adopted by parliament in September, defines the concept of antisemitism and reaffirms that crimes motivated by antisemitism are punishable in accordance with the law. Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to report attacks on their followers that went unpunished and detentions of members, reportedly for draft evasion. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, amendments to a law on military duty and service passed in April provided no possibility of an exemption from military reserve service until the end of the “special period” (i.e., while hostilities with Russia-led forces continue in parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts), even for conscientious objectors. Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to call on the government to implement four 2020 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions to ensure effective investigation of hate crimes committed against the group and its places of worship between 2009-13 and to prosecute the perpetrators of those religiously motivated attacks. During the year, the government paid compensation awarded by the ECHR to some, but not all, of the Jehovah’s Witnesses whom the ECHR found to be victims of hate crimes. In March, following an appeal by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine concerning the State Migration Service and the police practice of profiling worshippers at one of Kyiv’s largest mosques during Friday prayers in 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs said it would adhere to recommendations by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to reduce or eliminate criminal profiling. Members of multiple religious groups welcomed a law on military chaplaincy, adopted by the parliament in November, that defined selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains. According to the International Center for Law and Religious Studies, the government at times continued to try to balance tensions between the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) – granted autocephaly by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2019, but not recognized by the Patriarch of Moscow – and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), which competed for members and congregations. According to the *Orthodox Times* and other media, the Russian government continued to use a disinformation campaign to fuel further discord between the two churches. Local authorities in Lviv continued to allow a local developer to construct a private medical clinic on the grounds of an historical Jewish cemetery despite an August 2020 stop-work order from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. According to observers, government investigations and prosecutions of vandalism of religious sites continued to be generally inconclusive, although the government condemned attacks and police arrested perpetrators.

Media sources, religious freedom activists, the OCU, Muslims, Protestant churches, and Jehovah’s Witnesses stated that Russia-backed “authorities” in the Russia-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts continued to exert pressure on minority religious groups. In the “Luhansk People’s Republic” (“LPR”), “authorities” continued their ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses as an “extremist” organization, while the “Supreme Court” in the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“DPR”) upheld a similar ban. Russia-backed “authorities” in the “DPR” and “LPR” continued to implement “laws” requiring all religious organizations except the UOC-MP to undergo “state religious expert evaluations” and reregister with them. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), most religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law continued to be unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under Russian law preventing or discouraging reregistration. Many religious groups continued to refuse to reregister because they did not recognize the Russia-installed “authorities” in Donetsk and Luhansk. In its oral update on Ukraine in October, the OHCHR also highlighted that the self-proclaimed “republics”

continued to restrict freedom of religion, in particular of evangelical Christian denominations. All but one mosque remained closed in Russia-controlled Donetsk. Russia-led forces continued to use religious buildings of minority religious groups, including those of Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses, as military facilities.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the UOC-MP continued to label the OCU a “schismatic” group and continued to urge other Orthodox churches not to recognize the OCU. UOC-MP and OCU representatives continued to contest some parish registrations as not reflecting the true will of their congregations. UOC-MP leaders continued to accuse the OCU of seizing churches belonging to the UOC-MP; the OCU responded that parishioners, rather than the OCU, had initiated the transfers of affiliation. The independent National Minorities Rights Monitoring Group (NMRMG) reported three documented violent acts of antisemitism, compared with four in 2020. During Hanukkah (November 28-December 6), individuals vandalized several public menorahs in different cities, prompting condemnations from Jewish leaders, some of whom stating that the widespread vandalism must have been orchestrated. There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments; Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries; and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls. Church ownership disputes between UOC-MP and OCU members in Zadubrivka village, Chernivtsi Oblast, and in some other villages and cities continued. UOC-MP-affiliated media reported perpetrators attacked a man due to his church affiliation; OCU-affiliated media, however, citing the police report, stated the drunken teenage perpetrators were not religiously motivated. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) and the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations (AUCRA) continued to promote interfaith dialogue and respect for religious diversity.

U.S. embassy officials, including the Charge d’Affaires, engaged with officials of the Office of the President, ministry officials, members of parliament, and municipal governments to discuss the importance of fair and transparent treatment of religious groups, preservation of religious heritage sites, support for religious minorities, and combating manifestations of antisemitism. Embassy officials continued to urge government and religious leaders to practice tolerance, restraint, and mutual understanding to ensure respect for all individuals’ religious freedom and preferences. Embassy officials also continued to encourage religious groups to resolve property disputes peacefully and through dialogue with government officials, in particular a dispute regarding ongoing construction of parts of the Krakivsky Market on the site of the Lviv Old Jewish Cemetery. Embassy officials continued to meet with internally displaced Muslims and other religious minorities from Crimea to discuss their continuing inability to practice their religion freely in Russia-occupied Crimea. In May, the U.S. Secretary of State met with OCU leadership to discuss pressure on the OCU in Crimea and occupied territories of eastern Ukraine.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 43.7 million (midyear 2021). According to the annual November national survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, an independent public policy think tank, 60.0 percent of respondents identify as Christian Orthodox, compared with 62.3 percent in 2020; 8.8 percent Greek Catholic (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, UGCC), compared with 9.6 percent in 2020; 1.5 percent Protestant, the same as in 2020; 0.8 percent Roman Catholic, compared with 1.8 percent in 2020; 0.1 Jewish, the same as in 2020; and 0.2 percent Muslim, compared with under 0.5 percent in 2020. The survey found another 8.5 percent identify as “simply a Christian,” while 18.8 percent state they do not belong to any religious group, compared with 8.9 percent and 15.2 percent, respectively, in 2020. Small numbers of Buddhists, pagans (following traditional pre-Christian polytheistic beliefs, including animism), followers of other religions, and individuals choosing not to disclose their beliefs constitute the remainder of the respondents. According to the same survey, groups included in the 60.0 percent who identify as Christian Orthodox are as follows: 24.4 percent as members of the OCU, compared with 18.6 percent in 2020; 12.1 percent the UOC-MP, compared with 13.6 percent in 2020; 2.7 percent Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), compared with 2.3 percent in 2020; 19.8 percent “simply” an Orthodox believer,” compared with 32.7 percent in 2020; and 1.1 percent undecided, compared with 0.7 percent in 2020. According to the same poll, most of the self-identified OCU followers are in the western, central, and eastern parts of the country. UOC-MP followers were evenly dispersed throughout the country with a slightly higher concentration in the eastern part of the country. Most of the “just Orthodox” respondents live in the eastern, southern, and central parts of the country. Followers of the UGCC reside primarily in the western oblasts. Most Roman Catholic Church (RCC) followers are in the western and southern oblasts.

According to government statistics, followers of the UGCC reside primarily in the western oblasts of Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk. Most RCC congregations are in Lviv, Khmelnytsky, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsya, Zakarpattia, and Ternopil Oblasts, in the western part of the country. According to the government’s estimate as of January 1, most OCU congregations (formed by the merger of the UOC-KP, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and part of the UOC-MP) are in the central and western parts of the country, except for Zakarpattia Oblast. Most UOC-MP congregations are also in the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Odesa Oblasts, and in the central and western parts of the country, excluding Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Ternopil Oblasts.

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 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ).

Government agencies and independent think tanks estimate the Muslim population at 500,000, while some Muslim leaders estimate two million. According to government figures, 300,000 of these are Crimean Tatars.

The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) states there are approximately 300,000 persons of Jewish ancestry in the country, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. According to VAAD, prior to the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, approximately 30,000 Jews lived in the Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts). Jewish groups estimate between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish residents lived in Crimea before Russia’s purported annexation. According to the London-based Institute for Jewish Studies, the country’s Jewish population declined by 94.6 percent from 1970 to 2020. According to *NewLines Magazine*, Jewish emigration has slowed to 2,000 to 3,000 persons per year.

There are also small numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, practitioners of Falun Gong, Baha’is, and adherents of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including worship. By law, the government may restrict this right only in the “interests of protecting public order[or] 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 religious organizations from the state” and stipulates, “No religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory.”

The criminal code determines punishment, in the form of a fine or imprisonment, for “willful actions inciting national, racial, or religious enmity and hatred, humiliation of national honor and dignity, or the insult of citizens’ feelings with respect to their religious convictions, and also any direct or indirect restriction of rights, or granting direct or indirect privileges to citizens based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other convictions, disability, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, [or] linguistic or other characteristics.” By law, the objective of 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.” The law on the condemnation of the Communist and Nazi regimes establishes punishment for public denial of the criminal nature of those regimes, dissemination of information aimed at justifying their criminal nature, and the production and/or dissemination and public use of products containing their symbols.

The law requires the government to investigate crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed by the Communist and Nazi regimes, and to identify and preserve mass graves of their victims, research and publish information about repression, mass and individual murder, deaths, deportation, torture, use of forced labor and other forms of mass physical terror, and persecution based on “ethnic, national, religious, political, class, social, and other factors.” The law also requires the government to raise public awareness of Communist and Nazi-era crimes and to support nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) conducting research and education in that area.

The criminal code determines punishments (fines or imprisonment) for “willful actions inciting national, racial, or religious enmity and hatred, humiliation of national honor and dignity, or the insult of citizens’ feelings in respect to their religious convictions, and also any direct or indirect restriction of rights, or granting direct or indirect privileges to citizens based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other convictions, disability, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, [or] linguistic or other characteristics.”

A new law adopted by parliament in September and signed by President Zelensky on October 7 defines the concept of antisemitism and reaffirms punishment for crimes motivated by antisemitism. The law also reaffirms punishment for making false or stereotypical statements about persons of Jewish origin, producing, or disseminating materials containing antisemitic statements or content, and denying the facts of the persecution and mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust. The state may charge those found guilty of violating the law with civil, administrative, and criminal liability. Victims may also receive compensation for “material and moral damages.” Parliament’s passage of implementing legislation of the law was pending at year’s end.

Religious organizations include congregations, theological schools, monasteries, religious brotherhoods, missions, and administrations of religious associations consisting of religious organizations. To register and obtain legal-entity status, an organization must register either with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, which is the government agency responsible for religious affairs, or with regional government authorities, depending upon the nature of the organization. Religious centers, administrations, monasteries, brotherhoods, missions, and schools register with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. Congregations register with the regional authorities where they are present. While these congregations may form the constituent units of a nationwide religious organization, the nationwide organization does not register on a national basis and may not obtain recognition as a legal entity. The constituent units instead register individually and obtain legal-entity status.

Amendments to religious freedom legislation enacted in 2019 direct regional governments’ religious affairs departments to handle the dual registration. The amendments require all religious organizations to update and reregister their statutes by January 31, 2020. The amendments also specify reregistration requirements for organizations that wish to change their affiliation, particularly UOC-MP parishes seeking to join the OCU. The amended law requires a quorum, as defined by each congregation and usually comprising two-thirds or three-fourths

of a religious organization’s members, to decide on a change of affiliation. The law also requires a vote by two-thirds of those present to authorize such a decision. The law bans any transfer of an organization’s property until the affiliation change is finalized.

To be eligible for registration, a religious congregation must comprise at least 10 adult members and submit to the registration authorities its statute (charter), certified copies of the resolution that created it and was adopted by founding members, and a document confirming its right to own or use premises.

Registered religious groups wishing to acquire nonprofit status, which many do for banking purposes, must register with tax authorities.

Without legal-entity status, a religious group may not own property, conduct banking activities, be eligible for utility bill discounts, join civic or advisory boards of government agencies, or establish periodicals, nongovernmental pension funds, officially accredited schools, publishing, agricultural and other companies, or companies manufacturing religious items. Religious groups without legal-entity status may meet and worship and may also publish and distribute religious materials. In accordance with the stipulation against national registration, however, only a registered constituent unit of a nationwide religious organization may own property or conduct business activities, either for itself or on behalf of the nationwide organization. The law grants property tax exemptions to religious organizations and considers them nonprofit organizations.

The law requires commanders of military units to allow their subordinates to participate in religious services but bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units. The law prohibits UOC-MP priests from serving as chaplains on bases or in conflict zones, ostensibly due to concerns about their affiliation with Russia through the Moscow Patriarchate.

A law on military chaplaincy, adopted by parliament on November 30, defines selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains, their status in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, and other military formations. The legislation institutionalizes military chaplaincy according to NATO principles, gives chaplains the status of full-fledged service members, and provides for the same type of financial and social security support as other service members. The law protects the confidentiality of confession to a military chaplain and provides for the creation of interfaith councils on military chaplaincy as advisory bodies at the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

According to the constitution, organizers must notify local authorities in advance of any type of planned public gathering, and authorities may challenge the legality of the planned event. According to a 2016 Constitutional Court decision, religious organizations need only inform local authorities of their intention to hold a public gathering and need not apply for permission or notify authorities within a specific period in advance of the event.

Government regulations on identity documents, including passports, allow religious head coverings in photographs.

The law allows religious groups to establish theological schools to train clergy and other religious workers as well as to seek state accreditation through the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance for their curriculum. The law states theological schools shall function based on their own statutes.

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.”

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

The law prohibits religious instruction as part of the mandatory public school curriculum and states public school training “shall be free from interference by political parties, civic, and religious organizations.” Public schools include “ethics of faith” or similar faith-related courses as optional parts of the curricula. The law provides that Christian, Islamic, and Jewish-focused curriculums may offer ethics of faith courses in public schools.

The law provides for antidiscrimination screening of draft legislation and government regulations, including for discrimination based on religion. The law requires the legal department of each respective agency responsible for verifying draft legislation to conduct screening in accordance with instructions developed by the Cabinet of Ministers to ensure the draft legislation does not contain discriminatory language and to require changes if it does. Religious groups may participate in screening draft legislation at the invitation of the respective agency.

The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors. The law also allows government officials to deny a conscript’s application for alternative service due to missing the application deadline. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization. Amendments to a law on military duty and service passed in April allows no exemption from military reserve service during the “special period” (i.e., while hostilities with Russia-led forces continue), even for conscientious objectors.

The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (“Ombudsperson”) is constitutionally required to release an annual report to parliament containing 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 groups. By law, foreign religious workers may “preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,” but they may do so only for the registered religious organization that invited them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Since 2015, the government has exercised the right of derogation from its obligations under the ICCPR regarding the portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts under the control of Russia-led forces, including the ICCPR provisions pertaining to religious freedom.

Government Practices

Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to call on the government to implement four 2020 ECHR decisions to ensure effective investigation of the hate crimes committed against the group and its places of worship between 2009-13 and to prosecute the perpetrators of those religiously motivated attacks. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, during the year the government paid compensation awarded by the ECHR to the victims in the cases Zagubnya and Tabachkova v. Ukraine, Migoryanu and Others v. Ukraine, and Tretiak v. Ukraine. By year’s end, the government had not paid compensation to the victims in the case of Kornilova v. Ukraine. Jehovah’s Witnesses stated the government took no specific measures to implement those ECHR judgments by improving the current practice of hate crime investigations.

Some Jewish leaders and human rights activists continued to state concerns about what they considered impunity for hate crimes, including acts of antisemitism, and about the government’s long delays in completing investigations of these crimes. They also objected to authorities’ prosecuting many antisemitic acts as hooliganism rather than as hate crimes. According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, the lack of proper punishment for hate crimes “has long been a major problem, exacerbated by Article 161 of the criminal code [on incitement to enmity, religious, racial and other discrimination, etc.], which is notoriously difficult to prove and therefore most often avoided by the police and prosecutors.” Some Jewish leaders said law enforcement authorities often charged antisemitic actors, if apprehended, with hooliganism or vandalism instead of a hate crime in what they assessed was an attempt to downplay the criminal behavior. According to Freedom House, “Qualified professional legal assessment of hate crimes remains a serious problem: a motive either being ignored immediately with the crime qualified under other articles of the criminal code, or it is ‘lost’ at the stage of judicial inquiry.” Because it was harder to prove intent in hate crimes, some prosecutors reportedly chose to charge suspects with hooliganism instead.

Although the constitution and a law on alternative military service recognize the right to conscientious objection and provide the option of alternative civilian service, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the government did not uniformly recognize conscientious objection claims. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, officials frequently denied requests for alternative civilian service on the grounds of conscientious objection. Despite courts and the Parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsperson protecting the right of Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objectors to perform alternative civilian service, Jehovah’s Witnesses said some military enlistment officials arbitrarily detained Witnesses summoned for military service, and some district and oblast state administrations denied them the right to alternative service. Authorities also reportedly detained some Jehovah’s Witnesses for days while they faced criminal prosecution for “draft evasion.” According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, amendments to a law on military duty and service passed in April provided no possibility of an exemption from military reserve service during the “special period” (i.e., while hostilities with Russia-led forces continue), even for conscientious objectors.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, during the year, some local state administrations rejected applications for alternative civilian service, stating the applicants had missed the deadline for submission of their applications. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that on June 1, military conscription officers escorted Arthur Garry to the Lviv Regional Enlistment Office and attempted to return him to his army unit after denying his right to conscientious objection in May. Following a complaint filed by his attorney, the officers released him after three days. In November, the local authorities approved his request for alternative service.

On June 1, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, military conscription officers escorted Myroslav Sobutsky to the Rivne Regional Enlistment Office and tried to enlist him in the army after denying his right to conscientious objection in March. The Witnesses reported that Sobutsky fled to avoid forced conscription, which they said made him subject to possible criminal prosecution. Following a local court order, the local government approved his request for alternative service.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on January 15, the Ternopil District Administrative Court closed a draft-evasion case against Ihor Zhrebetsky based on his refusal to report for military service after authorities in 2017 denied his request for alternative service, stating he had missed the deadline for making such a request. On May 26, officials granted his request for alternative service, more than three years after he applied.

During the year, the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience (DESS), an office under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, stated its commitment to promoting uniformity and transparency in the provision of administrative services to religious organizations, including the examination of their registration applications, and it initiated the creation of an electronic register of religious organizations. On October 17, in response to press reports about alleged attempts by some oblasts’ state administrations, including the Kyiv Oblast State

Administration, to impede the transfer of parish affiliations from the UOC-MP to the OCU, the DESS invited the congregations facing such obstacles to submit their reregistration applications to the DESS for assessment and offered to help resolve registration-related disputes.

On November 20, parliament passed a law on military chaplaincy, defining selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains, their status in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, and other military formations. Members of various religious groups welcomed the new law. In an interview with Radio Liberty, OCU Primate Metropolitan Epiphaniy stated, “In the Ukrainian army, about 80 percent of chaplains are chaplains of the OCU. Therefore, we are grateful to the Verkhovna Rada [parliament] that we finally managed to adopt the relevant bill.” The UOC-MP Legal Department head, Archpriest Alexander Bakhov, said the new law removed text from the initial draft that prohibited or restricted UOC-MP priests from serving as military chaplains; however, he said that during the implementation of the law “there may be surprises” that would discriminate against the UOC-MP. The UGCC head, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, expressed confidence that the UGCC would continue to take care of the spiritual and religious needs of soldiers at various levels, ensure proper pastoral care, and promote the personal integrity and spiritual growth of the defenders of Ukraine.

Some religious experts continued to call on the government to abolish the dual registration requirement that congregations apply for both entry into the State Register of Legal Entities database and for government registration of their statutes. A September article written by columnist Dmytro Horyevoy, who follows religious freedom issues, called on the government to streamline and remove flaws in the registration process. He emphasized the inconvenience of requiring in-person registration at both an oblast’s and a city center’s government offices, which, in some cases, were located hundreds of kilometers from one another, in a 24-hour period.

According to the International Center for Law and Religious Studies, the government continued to struggle to manage tensions between the OCU and the UOC-MP, which often competed for members and parishes. The *Orthodox Times*, which states it is an independent news and information portal, reported that Russia continued to use a disinformation campaign to fuel further discord between the two Churches. News sources reported that the UOC-MP continued to question the legitimacy of the OCU and the UOC-MP stated that the OCU was “stealing” its property. The OCU stated the UOC-MP legally challenged the reregistration of parishes from the UOC-MP to the OCU. The UOC-MP continued to report instances of “unlawful” reregistration by some local governments. The OCU denied these charges.

The Constitutional Court continued reviewing a 2020 petition by a group of members of parliament questioning the constitutionality of 2018 amendments to the law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations requiring the UOC-MP, formally registered as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), to rename itself to reflect its affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC). The petition and a 2019 Supreme Court ruling in a separate suit by the UOC-MP Metropolitan Administration against the amendments prevented the government from enforcing the name change requirement for 267 UOC-MP organizations. The organizations were a third party in the lawsuit filed by the UOC-MP Metropolitan Administration. On February 5, the head of the Religion Department of the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers, Andriy Yurash, stated the courts’ failure to address the 2020 petition was criminal, saying that “not responding is a sign that this is either unprofessionalism, or unwillingness, or a conscious return to that scheme and an attempt to challenge the existing realities.” In a May 8 Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) interview, Minister of Culture and Information Policy Oleksandr Tkachenko cautioned against attempts to escalate the debate over the renaming and said dialogue was the best way to address the situation.

Oblast-level religious affairs departments were still unable to meet the one-year registration deadline for congregations under the amended 2019 registration law, partly due to a lengthy restructuring of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy in 2020, including a transition from the Department for Religions and Nationalities to the DESS. The law did not include a penalty for missing a reregistration deadline. According to the Institute of Religious Freedom, congregations reregistered their statutes according to the new law when they needed to amend their statutes.

In September, authorities worked with Israeli and U.S. health authorities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during the annual Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast. An estimated 25,000-50,000 pilgrims celebrated Rosh Hashanah in Uman. Officials estimated approximately 10,000 pilgrims arrived weeks ahead of the holiday to ensure they were in-country should Ukraine close its borders due to the pandemic, as it did in 2020. In 2020, the government closed the country’s borders for the month of September, coinciding with the Jewish holidays when thousands of pilgrims travel to the country, and it extended domestic quarantine regulations by two months, limiting the number of travelers who could participate in the pilgrimage.

In March, the Ministry of Internal Affairs said it would adhere to general recommendations by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to reduce or eliminate criminal profiling, following an appeal by the Umma Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine about the State Migration Service and the police practice of worshiper profiling near one of Kyiv’s largest mosques during Friday prayers in 2020. In the annual presentation of a report to parliament in March, the Parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsperson requested the Ministry of Internal Affairs review the Umma’s appeal. The ombudsperson requested the ministry consider recommendations by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to counter ethnic profiling.

In February, UOC-MP-associated media reported local supporters continued to face resistance from the Zolochiv Municipal Council, Lviv Oblast to their request to build a church in the town. On March 9, an administrative court ruled against Zolochiv authorities’ request that the court declare the construction of the parish church illegal. On

March 12, the Zolochiv regional police department closed criminal proceedings against local deputies accused of “hooliganism” and “inciting religious hatred” in connection with the construction. Lawyers for the UOC-MP said they believed that the closure of the criminal case indicated local authorities had improperly pressured the investigators and said they planned to appeal. In 2020, the Zolochiv Municipal Council refused to allow the construction on the grounds that many UOC-MP representatives had supported Russia’s war against the country.

Law enforcement authorities continued to report no progress in the investigation of allegations that the Kyiv Islamic Cultural Center of the Umma Spiritual Administration possessed materials promoting “violence, racial, interethnic, or religious hatred.” The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Kyiv city procuracy originally searched the center in May 2018. A lawyer for the Umma described the search as an attempt to undermine the Umma’s reputation and called the charges baseless.

In July, the Kryvyi Rih City Council approved a change to a zoning plan in favor of designating land for Jehovah’s Witnesses to use for a Kingdom Hall. This decision resulted from a 2019 ECHR judgment that ruled against deputies of the Kryvyi Rih City Council who had refused to lease land to Jehovah’s Witnesses for the Kingdom Hall’s construction.

On November 11, media reported the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy agreed to return the Roman Catholic parish of St. Nicholas Cathedral to the parish for permanent use on June 1, 2022. Soviet authorities took over the cathedral in the 1930s. The congregation shares the cathedral with the National House of Organ and Chamber Music. The ministry stated it would return the church after completing necessary emergency repairs following an electrical fire on September 3.

In May, the Volyn Oblast State Administration returned a synagogue to the Jewish community in Lutsk confiscated by the Soviet-era government. According to Hanna Matusovska, a representative of the Jewish Community of Lutsk, the community was considering creating a synagogue/museum in the building with financial support from Ukrainian communities living in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

Small religious groups stated local authorities continued to discriminate when allocating land for religious buildings in Sumy, Mykolayiv, and Ternopil Oblasts, and the city of Kyiv. Roman Catholics, OCU members, UGCC members, Jews, and Muslims continued to report cases of discrimination. UGCC representatives said local authorities in Bila Tserkva were still unwilling to allocate land for a UGCC church at year’s end, a request originally made in 2008.

Kyiv’s Muslim community said the local government, responsible for allocating land for cemeteries, had still not acted on the community’s request from 2017 for additional free land in or near Kyiv for Islamic burials, which the Muslim community considered its legal right because by law local authorities may designate cemetery land for the use of a specific religious group. Consequently, some Muslim families living in Kyiv reportedly had to bury their relatives in other cities.

All major religious organizations continued to appeal to the government to establish a transparent legal process for addressing property restitution claims. According to observers, the government made little progress on unresolved restitution issues during the year. Representatives of some organizations said they experienced continuing problems and delays reclaiming property seized by the former Communist regime and said a review of claims often took far longer than the month prescribed by law. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups stated several factors continued to complicate the restitution process, including intercommunity competition for particular properties, current use of some properties by state institutions, the designation of some properties as historic landmarks, local governments disputing jurisdictional boundaries, and previous transfers of some properties to private ownership.

Muslim community leaders continued to state concern about the continuing lack of resolution of a restitution claim involving the site containing the ruins of an historic mosque in Mykolaiv, in the southern part of the country. According to Muslim leaders, the local government was reluctant to resolve the issue.

Jewish community leaders continued to report illegal construction on the site of the old Jewish cemetery in Uman, where businesspersons had purchased old houses bordering the cemetery to demolish them and build hotels for Jewish pilgrims. According to news reports, developers had reportedly made deals with local government officials to obtain building permits. A representative from the Uman mayor’s office said in October that the government could not stop the sale of or ban digging on privately owned land and that it was impossible to stop illegal construction. The official said, however, that the government had not issued new building permits and had agreed not to sell any municipality-owned cemetery property.

The Jewish community continued to express concern about the ongoing operation of the Krakivsky Market on the grounds of an historical Jewish cemetery in Lviv. City authorities, Jewish community members, and market kiosk owners agreed to install three memorials to renowned rabbis buried beneath the active market. Construction on the first memorial started on October 20. Despite a 2020 Ministry of Culture and Information Policy order that a local developer halt construction of a private health clinic on the protected site, Lviv authorities allowed construction to continue during the year, stating that the renovation of the clinic did not require excavation. Jewish community representatives said they feared the Lviv government would sell more of the public land to private groups, which could further diminish their ability to protect the cemetery. The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) continued to urge the government to halt permanently the construction of a multistory commercial

building on the cemetery grounds separate from the health clinic construction that had been ordered suspended in 2017. According to local authorities, the commercial building project in question involved reconstruction of an existing building and required no excavation.

The UCSJ continued to express its concern about the possible continuation of construction of a high-rise building at the site of the World War II Jewish ghetto during the Nazi occupation of Lviv. In 2016, a court suspended the project after human remains were reportedly found and removed from the site. In the past, the UCSJ had requested the remains be reburied on the site but as of year’s end, the remains had not been reburied. Lviv authorities denied the construction had unearthed any remains.

Jewish community leaders said they continued to experience difficulties with the Ternopil municipal and district governments regarding property restitution. The Ternopil District Council continued to reject requests from the local Jewish community to return a prayer house confiscated during the Soviet era.

According to observers, government investigations and prosecutions of vandalism against religious sites continued to be generally inconclusive, although the government condemned attacks and police arrested perpetrators.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on January 24, unidentified individuals wrote the word “sect” on a fence surrounding a Kingdom Hall in Volodymyr-Volynskiy, Volyn Oblast. A local court ordered police to open an investigation, which they did, adding it to the investigations of three similar acts of vandalism committed against the Kingdom Hall in 2020. According to the privately owned court verdicts database Verdictum.ligazakon.net, on January 14, police began to investigate the three 2020 incidents as “hooliganism,” following the filing of a complaint of religiously motivated hate crimes. The cases remained pending at year’s end.

On June 7, Jehovah’s Witnesses representatives reported unidentified vandals damaged the facade of the local Kingdom Hall in Tismenytsya, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, with stones. The police did not initiate an investigation by year’s end.

On August 6, media reported unidentified vandals had desecrated the grave of the daughter of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov with “pieces of pigs, including a skull” in Kremenchuk. A Breslov Hasidic resident who was visiting the grave saw the vandalism and reported it to the police. “This is not the first time that antisemites have harmed the grave,” Breslov Hasid Rabbi Avraham Chezin said, adding that he hoped the vandals would be found and taken to court. According to the Kremenchuk Jewish community, law enforcement officials identified the perpetrators and solved the case.

On October 6, President Zelenskyy and the privately funded Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC) cohosted an 80th anniversary commemoration ceremony in honor of Holocaust victims of the September 1941 Babyn Yar massacre, held at the Babyn Yar Historical Memorial Preserve in Kyiv. The presidents of Israel, Germany, and Albania spoke at the event, and prominent members of the Jewish community, including Natan Sharansky and Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and all Ukraine Yaakov Bleich, also spoke or attended. Jewish community members and historians continued to express concern that the BYHMC’s symbolic “pop-up” synagogue, opened on May 14 and commemorating the Babyn Yar massacre, stood on historical Jewish and Christian Orthodox cemeteries.

On October 25, the Prosecutor General’s Office reported that a court in Zaporizhzhya sentenced to seven years in prison a local resident who in 2019 organized an attempt to set fire to a local UOC-MP church. The SBU prevented the arson attack. Law enforcement authorities said the “DPR Ministry of State Security (MGB)” directed and paid the individual. According to the SBU, the “MGB” instructed the offender to post a video of the arson that media would portray as an attack on a UOC-MP church by the laity of the newly established OCU.

On January 2, Israeli Ambassador Joel Lion tweeted his criticism of decisions by some parliamentarians and government authorities to commemorate and honor on January 1, Ukrainian figures and organizations who were also associated with antisemitism and the killing of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles during World War II. On January 7, after the Israeli ambassador condemned the commemoration, dozens of protesters rallied outside the Israeli Embassy in Kyiv, which was closed for Orthodox Christmas, to demand that Jews apologize for Soviet oppression and that they assume responsibility for the *Holodomor*, the Stalin-engineered famine that killed millions of Ukrainians in the 1930s. “Israel deliberately spreads antisemitism in Ukraine,” said Vladislav Goranin during a speech at the rally. He said Jews and Israel must “repent for the genocide” of Ukrainians. A VAAD copresident said a pro-Russian group had funded the protest; a member of the protest subsequently denied that claim on *Expresso.tv* news.

Media reported that on April 28, hundreds of persons attended marches celebrating Nazi SS soldiers, including the first such event in Kyiv. The March of Embroidered Shirts took place on the 78th anniversary of the establishment of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division (1st Galician) of the SS, also known as the Galicia Division – a force set up under the German occupation composed of ethnic Ukrainian and German volunteers and conscripts. The marchers held banners displaying the unit’s symbol. One of the participants used a Nazi salute. Police identified the suspect and charged him with Nazi propaganda and petty hooliganism. President Zelenskyy condemned the marches honoring the Waffen SS unit, stating they were illegal. “We categorically condemn any manifestation of propaganda of totalitarian regimes, in particular National Socialism, and attempts to revise the truth about World War II,” he said in a statement on April 30. Following the April 28 march, Anton Drobovych, director of the Ukraine Institute of National Memory (UINM), an executive body under the Cabinet of Ministers, condemned the glorification of the SS forces as unacceptable and expressed confidence that the absolute majority of Ukrainians did not support such

glorification. On May 1, the Kyiv City-State Administration issued a statement saying, “There can be no justification for the propaganda of totalitarian regimes.” According to the administrators, organizers of the gathering had described the planned event to the local government as an ordinary March of Embroidered Shirts, an annual event that celebrates national identity.

In his opening speech to the All-Ukrainian Forum “Ukraine 30: Humanitarian Policy” in Kyiv on July 13, President Zelenskyy referenced the beginning of the Babyn Yar massacre, calling it “a terrible symbol of the Holocaust on our Ukrainian land. We cannot get rid of it, but we can win by honoring the memory of all the victims, all the deceased... We are responsible to all past and all future generations for historical justice.” In his speech, he said 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews were murdered, including those murdered at Babyn Yar. He continued, “We have no right to forget and will not forget this. It is extremely important for Ukraine to honor, at a high level, all the victims of this tragedy.” Speaking about the Babyn Yar 80th anniversary commemoration ceremony, he added, “We will hospitably receive on our land everyone who comes on this day to share with us our common pain, to honor the memory of the tragedy that shocked the whole world, to remember the dead, to thank, first of all, our Righteous.” In reference to the planned BYHMC memorial complex, he said, “It is our duty to make Babyn Yar a place of memory, not a place of oblivion... As a state, we strive to make this place worthy of the memory of more than 100,000 Holocaust victims. It is very important that these aspirations are shared by our community. I am sure that all Ukrainians share them.”

Media reported that in an August 21 meeting in Kyiv with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, President Zelenskyy called Ukraine a unique example of the peaceful coexistence of many religious denominations. President Zelenskyy also stated that Russia used religion as a “hybrid weapon” against Ukraine by violating fundamental human rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of religion, in Ukrainian territory controlled by Russia.

At a September 1 visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., President Zelenskyy lit candles at the Babyn Yar memorial and gave the museum digitized copies of 43 Yiddish letters from the country’s Unread Letters 1941 collection. He said, “Most of the authors of the letters, including children, died in August 1941 during the first mass executions of the Jewish population in Ukraine. Today, we are providing copies of these valuable documents, which preserve human pain and hope, to the U.S. Holocaust Museum. Today we are doing everything to make ‘Never Again’ really mean – never again.” Zelenskyy said that of the six million Jews who died in Europe, every fourth person was from Ukraine. He told the story of four brothers, three of whom, together with their families, were shot by the German invaders. The fourth brother served on the frontline through World War II, contributing to the victory over Nazism. “His grandson became President of Ukraine. And now he is standing in front of you,” President Zelenskyy said. He also said that in modern Ukraine, the ideology of racism and intolerance had no chance, referencing his own election as a president with Jewish ancestry. He continued, “The people of Ukraine cannot have the germs of antisemitism and Nazism at the genetic level. It cannot be in the heart or in the soul of the Ukrainian people who survived Babyn Yar on their land.”

Media reported that in President Zelenskyy’s October 5 meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, the presidents had agreed to continue to cooperate to preserve and enrich the cultural heritage and traditions of the Ukrainian and Jewish peoples. President Herzog noted what he stated were the systematic efforts of Ukraine to create appropriate conditions for Jewish pilgrims to visit historical and holy places on its territory and perform religious rites, including the annual pilgrimage of Hasidim to Uman. Both parties stressed the need to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and the importance of educational efforts at the national and international level to prevent a recurrence of such horrific crimes. The presidents noted the role of the Righteous Among Nations from Ukraine (gentiles who assisted Jews) in the rescue of Jews during World War II. They condemned all manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia, and antisemitism. President Herzog praised the efforts of President Zelenskyy and his government to fight antisemitism, specifically noting the country’s September 23 adoption of the Law on Preventing and Combating Antisemitism, which defines antisemitism as hatred of Jews and bans it. The law also states that manifestations of antisemitism could encompass actions against Jewish individuals as well as their property, religious buildings, or communities.

In April, Jehovah’s Witnesses’ representatives held a series of virtual academic and press events to mark the 70th anniversary of Operation North, the 1951 Soviet deportation of 9,793 Jehovah’s Witnesses to Siberia. Participants, including foreign scholars and government officials, unanimously condemned the Soviet deportation. The head of UINM, Anton Drobovych, noted that, thanks to individuals who actively defended their values, the country’s laws considered the specific dimensions and needs of different religious groups. For example, the law provided for alternative service for those who could serve in the military due to their religious beliefs. A religious scholar called on the community of Jehovah’s Witnesses to create information materials, brochures, exhibitions, and videos to teach the history of Operation North and assured them UINM would support such promotional work.

The Constituent Assembly of the Congress of Muslims held its inaugural meeting on November 27. According to representatives of the congress, its composition and further activities would be based on the principles of equality for representatives of all Islamic scientific and legal trends and ethnic groups for the development of the country’s Muslim community. In an address, representative of the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers Ivan Papayani read a welcoming address from Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stating, “On behalf of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and on my own behalf, let me congratulate you on the start of this important Congress for Muslims of our state. Islam has always been and will continue to be a significant component of the religious and confessional space of Ukraine.”

Actions of Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

During the year, the Russia-instigated conflict in eastern Ukraine continued, with parts of the country’s Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts under the control of Russia-installed “authorities” in the “DPR” and “LPR.” According to press reports, religious groups not approved by Russia continued to face restrictions, especially religious groups that were legal in Ukraine but illegal in Russia, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the independent Muslim congregation Hizb ut-Tahir, whose members continued to face arrest, detention, and harassment. In its oral update on Ukraine in October, the OHCHR highlighted that the self-proclaimed “republics” continued to restrict freedom of religion, in particular of evangelical Christian denominations.

Sources reported that Russia-supported “authorities” in the “DPR” and “LPR” continued to detain and imprison Jehovah’s Witnesses as well as leaders of other religious groups. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the “DPR” continued to label the group as an extremist organization, while the “LPR” “Supreme Court” refused to acknowledge the Witnesses as an organization. According to Protestant and Jehovah’s Witnesses groups, many of their members continued to flee these areas to escape oppressive conditions and to seek greater religious freedom in government-controlled territory. The Jehovah’s Witness annual report stated that, “In general, Jehovah’s Witnesses practice their faith freely in Ukraine. They are legally registered, and the government does not restrict their religious activity.” In the occupied territory of Donetsk, however, their report stated, “[t]here is a real threat of kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment at all times for every Jehovah’s Witness.” In Luhansk, the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported “authorities” did not allow the group to officially register, and any religious activity without official registration was strictly prohibited.

The OHCHR reported that a majority of religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law continued to be unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under Russian legislation preventing or discouraging reregistration. Many religious groups continued to refuse to reregister because they did not recognize the Russia-installed “authorities” in the “DPR” and “LPR.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses representatives said the group had limited access to information on the situation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the “DPR” and “LPR” during the year. They said that since 2014, “LPR” and “DPR” “authorities” had seized 14 Kingdom Halls in Russia-controlled parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, official and de facto bans on their activities in the “DPR” and “LPR” deprived their congregations of houses of worship. Russian-led military units destroyed some of those buildings, and occupied others. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, none of the buildings could be used due to threats of kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment.

“LPR”

Russia-established “LPR” “authorities” continued to deny the reregistration applications of Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist groups, in accordance with a 2018 law by “LPR” “authorities” that required religious communities, with the exception of the UOC-MP, which was recognized “within the framework of the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate,” to reregister with “LPR” “authorities”. In denying the applications, “authorities” also cited a 2015 decree that banned mass events while the area was under martial law. According to Forum 18, an international religious freedom NGO, the latest figures from December 2019 reported 195 religious organizations registered by “LPR” “authorities.” Of these 195 organizations, 188 belonged to the UOC-MP, four were Muslim, and there was one each of Old Believers, Jews, and Roman Catholics.

Religious leaders continued to say “LPR’s” reregistration denials represented a complete ban on their religious activities, since without reregistration, religious groups were not able to hold services, even in believers’ homes. According to “LPR” “authorities,” to be eligible for registration, a local religious organization must have at least 30 adult members, while a centralized religious organization must be composed of at least five such local organizations. These requirements effectively disqualified some smaller religious associations. The law also required Christian Orthodox congregations to register as part of a “diocese recognized by the Orthodox Churches around the world within the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate,” thereby forcing several remaining OCU parishes to conduct any activities underground.

“LPR” “authorities” continued to ban many religious leaders from outside their territory from reaching their congregations, according to Forum 18.

On July 20, the office of the “LPR” “Prosecutor General” announced that the Dovzhansk (formerly Sverdlovsk) “City and District Court” of the “LPR” had banned some missionary publications distributed by the Luhansk Oblast branch of the International Union of Churches of Evangelical Baptist Christians (Union of Churches Baptists). The office deemed the materials to be extremist. The court declared that the Baptist organization was functioning without proper registration. The declaration indicated that the publications could incite religious discord, contained “propaganda of exceptionalism, superiority, and inadequacy of the individual on the basis of religious adherence or attitude to religion,” and violated “the rights, freedoms and legal interests of a person and a citizen depending on his religious adherence or attitude to religion.” According to Forum18, the declaration noted that the Union of Churches Baptists had conducted its activities in the region without Justice Ministry registration. According to Forum18, the “State List of Extremist Materials” contained 26 items: 18 published by Protestants and six by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

On May 15, the *Novosti Donbassa* news website posted photographs of tombstones reportedly destroyed by a tank of Russia-led forces at a cemetery in Perevalsk, in a Russia-controlled part of Luhansk Oblast. The website quoted eyewitnesses as saying the tank went deep into the cemetery, turned around, and left the area, crushing multiple tombstones and uprooting trees. According to local residents, occupation “authorities” had ignored their complaints following a similar incident in the cemetery in 2020.

“DPR”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on February 1, an elderly Jehovah’s Witness visited the migration service of the Kirovsky District of Donetsk to receive a passport. The service staff checked her phone and began to question her. When she said she was a Jehovah’s Witness, “authorities” took her to the prosecutor’s office, where another employee of the migration service questioned her. The woman later said she believed “DPR” representatives were trying to link her to the Ukrainian security services.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, in May, “L” and her adult daughter, who was not a Jehovah’s Witness, returned from government-controlled Ukraine to the “DPR.” Upon crossing the border, “DPR” “MGB” officers detained L’s daughter on charges of espionage for Ukraine and then searched L’s house in connection with her daughter’s case. During the search, the “MGB” confiscated *Watchtower* and *Awake* magazines and the New World Translation Bible. The “MGB” summoned L and questioned her about other fellow believers, Witnesses elders, and religious services.

According to media, on May 8, Olha Solodovnik, the “head of the Khartsyzsk Department of Education,” instructed kindergartens in the town of Zugres to immediately provide “lists of students and their parents who may belong to prohibited organizations.”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on July 31, when Jehovah’s Witness “D” entered the “DPR” from Russia’s Rostov Region, an MGB representative examined his phone and tablet and found Jehovah’s Witnesses’ publications on it. The “MGB” arrested D and took him to Chystyakove (formerly Torez) for questioning. During the interrogation, an “investigator” mentioned to him the names of other believers. “MGB” representatives beat the detainee, hitting his head in a manner that did not leave bruises. They seized his Ukrainian passports, mobile phone, and tablet. During a second interrogation on August 3, the “MGB” sought to recruit D as an informant and asked questions about other believers and religious services. The “MGB” said “DPR” “authorities” would soon open criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses and carry out searches, without specifying the kinds of searches. The “MGB” did not return the confiscated items to D.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, throughout the year, “DPR” “authorities” often required male believers to undergo military training and threatened those who refused with large fines. For several hours, “MGB” representatives intimidated a Jehovah’s Witness from the city of Makiyivka after he refused to participate in training and fined him.

The “DPR’s” law on worship and religious associations continued to “ban all religious organizations that did not meet a March 2019 registration deadline and to require previously registered religious groups to reregister.” The law accords the “Ministry of Culture” authority to “monitor the registration of religious associations in the region and to abolish such groups on various grounds. Any newly created religious association not seeking legal entity status must submit written notification to “DPR” “authorities” detailing its function, location, administration, and the names and home addresses of its members.” According to the law, “authorities” have 10 days either to put the group on the register of religious groups or to cancel its legal status. “Authorities” have a month to examine the application documents of a religious association seeking legal status. In either case, a state religious expert may conduct an evaluation of the documents, which could take up to six months, or deny a registration request on several grounds, including on the grounds that application materials lacked required information or that the group was previously banned. All religious organizations and religious groups must notify “authorities” annually of their continued viability. The law allows the UOC-MP to undergo a simplified legalization procedure without reregistration and state religious expert evaluation.

On March 30, the “DPR” amended the law defining what constitutes a religious association, upholding the stipulation that religious associations exist only if they are registered. The amendments tightened the definition of a religious association, restricting its activities to only “participants and/or members.” The amendment defines a religious association’s activities as holding religious beliefs, conducting worship services and other religious rites and ceremonies, and “the teaching of religion and the religious education of its participants and/or members.” The amendment removed the definition of religious activity as “missionary practice and religious educational activity, including the spread of religious knowledge, the provision of professional religious education and the religious education of its participants.”

According to Forum 18, “DPR” “authorities” denied registration to almost all religious communities, apart from the UOC-MP. As of September 2019, “DPR” “authorities” had registered only 36 non-Moscow Patriarchate religious communities. On September 28, the “Justice Ministry” told Forum 18 it was no longer responsible for the registration of religious communities. On March 16, the “Minister of Culture,” which assumed responsibility for the registration of religious groups, reported to the “DPR” “parliament” registrations of religious organizations it handled in 2020. The “DPR” had not published new registration statistics by year’s end.

According to religious organizations and civil society activists, “DPR” authorities continued to harass Protestant congregations attempting to host public religious events, even if such groups possessed a DPR registration. “DPR” authorities charged that the United States government might be funding such events, and they publicly labeled congregations “American agents.” Protestant leaders and religious experts said they attributed such activities by the Russia-administered “DPR” (and “LPR”) as attempts to undermine the strong prewar presence of Protestants in the region.

Forum 18 reported that a wide range of religious groups, in particular Protestant groups, preferred not to discuss their situation in the “DPR.” Religious communities also told Forum 18 they feared that meeting in private homes for worship could lead to raids and possible punishment.

According to Forum 18, in June, the “DPR” “Justice Ministry” released an updated “List of Extremist Materials” containing 97 items, some of them religious. Most publications banned by the “Supreme Court” – including Jehovah’s Witness and Muslim publications – also appeared on the list. “DPR” “authorities” did not respond either to Forum 18’s inquiry into who initiated the suit to ban six publications by the Latvian-based Pastor Aleksey Ledyayev, head of New Generation Protestant Church, or to its request for a copy of the court’s 2020 verdict against Ledyayev.

According to Forum 18, on June 25, “Culture Minister” Mikhail Zheltyakov instructed all institutions under the ministry’s control to publicly display the lists of banned organizations and banned publications in their institutions.

Forum 18 reported that Article 329 of the “DPR” criminal code punished “organizing an extremist organization” with fines, compulsory labor, or imprisonment of up to eight years. “Participating in an extremist organization” carried a maximum punishment of four years’ imprisonment. Recruiting others to join such an organization carried a maximum punishment of six years’ imprisonment. Forum 18 also reported that Article 330 of the criminal code punished “organizing the activity of an extremist organization,” including religious organizations that a court had banned. Organizing such activity carried a maximum eight-year prison term, participation in such activity a maximum four-year prison term, and recruiting others a maximum six-year prison term.

Forum 18 reported that Jehovah’s Witnesses remained on the “DPR” list of 53 “liquidated or banned social and religious associations and other organizations.” According to Forum 18, on June 17, “DPR” authorities banned two Protestant churches, Good News Baptist Church and the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, due to violations of the registration requirement of the Religion Law. On June 25, “authorities” also tried to ban the activity of the Church of the Awakening, a Baptist church in the town of Yenakieve, as well as any branches or sub-divisions. According to Forum 18, the Church of the Awakening was still able to meet for worship while it tried to reregister. “Officials” from the “Prosecutor General’s Office,” “the Arbitration Court,” and Religion and Nationalities Department of the “Culture Ministry” in Donetsk did not answer Forum 18’s telephoned or written inquiries about the closures of the churches.

“DPR” “authorities” continued to use seized places of worship for their own purposes. According to Forum 18, the “authorities” used a former Donetsk Church of Jesus Christ building as a registry office and the former Makeyevka New Life Baptist Church as a Red Guard district registry office.

On November 30, Ukrainian media reported pro-Russia Donetsk militants had converted a Church of Jesus Christ building into a “Russian house” in order to “strengthen ties with Russia.” According to Ukrainian journalist, Denis Kazansky, “It is symbolic that it is located in a captured Mormon temple. Mormons once built the house at their own expense. But the Russians do not think so. Why build something if you can just squeeze someone else?”

According to media reports, all but one mosque remained closed in the “DPR.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The NMRMG reported a decrease in antisemitic violence, with one suspected case reported during the year compared with four cases in 2020. As of September 1, the NMRMG recorded four cases of antisemitic vandalism, compared with seven incidents during the same period in 2020.

The United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU) reported 49 cases of antisemitism in 2020 (the last year for which data was available), compared with 56 cases in 2019. The difference in the count of antisemitic acts between the NMRMG and the UJCU was due to variations in methodologies. NMRMG said it counted vandalism only on Jewish property, such as synagogues, cemeteries, or memorials, while the UJCU included a wider range of incidents, such as a Jewish student’s dormitory being vandalized with swastikas, as well as verbal disputes involving antisemitic epithets.

On July 21, NMRMG reported a man attacked a Hasidic man in a park in the village of Torhovytysya in Kirovohrad Oblast. The attacker approached the man as he walked with his wife and nine children and aggressively demanded to shake the hand of the man’s wife. According to the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, when the woman refused, the attacker began punching and kicking the Hasidic man, breaking his nose. The attacker and a second individual pursued the victim and his family by car as they drove to the hospital, aggressively pulling up alongside them. Police detained the suspected attacker and his accomplice on charges of attempted robbery.

According to the local Jewish community, as of year’s end, the person armed with an ax who attempted to enter a synagogue in Mariupol in July 2020 remained in a psychiatric hospital in Rostov-on-Don while a Russian district court reviewed the case against him. According to media, law enforcement authorities had previously identified the suspect, and a Mariupol court had sanctioned his arrest, but he subsequently fled to Russia. In August 2020, Russian authorities detained him in Rostov-on-Don.

On June 2, media reported an unknown gunman shot at a synagogue in Kremenchuk on May 1. According to Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*, local Jewish community leaders kept the incident quiet for nearly a month to avoid panic. Local Rabbi Shlomo Salamon said, “It was one bullet.... We suddenly saw that the window had a hole, and the guard didn’t hear it. The bullet didn’t penetrate the second pane of glass and go into the synagogue.” Salamon said he decided to discuss the attack after he was contacted by the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, which said its “policy is to make it public, to attract attention.” Asked about how his congregants responded to the news, Salamon replied that while some persons were concerned, others downplayed the incident. “When I go in the street with a *kippah*, I don’t feel any antisemitism,” he said.

In July 12, the Kherson City court found two local residents guilty of deliberate destruction of property by arson motivated by national and religious intolerance in connection with an April 2020 arson attack on a synagogue. According to law enforcement, the perpetrators supported Nazi ideology and carried out the attack to mark Hitler’s birthday. The suspects received four-year suspended sentences, with one year of probation. During their trial, the Chief Rabbi of Kherson requested leniency for the teenaged suspects, which the judge granted. After meeting with the individuals, the rabbi said he decided to give them a second chance in life, stating, “What would happen to those young empty-headed men in prison? Most likely they will turn into criminals.” A few weeks before their court hearing, local television channels broadcast the suspects’ public apology to the Jewish community.

According to the UJCU, on October 14, two unidentified individuals raised a large banner in front of President Zelenskyy’s office reading, “Jewish President Zelenskyy” and condemning the country’s “occupation and robbery” by “the Dnipro Jewish clan of Vova [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy.” Michael Tkach, UJCU executive director, said the banner was an act of incitement and called on authorities to punish those responsible for it. Police opened an investigation, which continued through year’s end.

Media reported that during Hanukkah (November 28-December 6), individuals vandalized several public menorahs in different cities. On November 24, Yuriy Tebenko attempted to vandalize a menorah at Independence Square (Maidan) in Kyiv. Municipal security guards stopped him. According to the UJCU, Tebenko was accompanied by Andriy Rachok, a vandal who toppled the menorah in Kyiv’s Podil district in 2020. During the year, Rachok continued to post antisemitic statements on his Facebook page. Police reportedly briefly detained Rachok and Tebenko. On December 22, Kyiv’s Shevchenkovsky District Court upheld an UJCU complaint regarding police inaction in response to UJCU’s report on the incident. The court ordered police to open an investigation.

According to media, on November 30, unidentified persons cut electric cables on a menorah in Mykolayiv, making it impossible to light. Chief Rabbi of Mykolayiv Sholom Gottlieb said, “We have been lighting these Hanukkah candles in the city center for many years. Thank God everything is calm, cozy, and pleasant. We have support and state support, including to celebrate this holiday in peace. But the fact is that it happened to us and in other cities at the same time – this may indicate that someone is trying not to let this holiday go smoothly.” Also on November 30, unidentified vandals toppled a Hanukkah menorah in Kyiv’s Troyeshchyna District.

On December 4, unidentified individuals destroyed an electrical switch and light bulbs on a menorah in Rivne. After installing the menorah, the local Jewish community reportedly received threats from a local resident who expressed support for the menorah vandalism Andriy Rachok committed in Kyiv in 2020. According to press reports, police were investigating the case as hooliganism.

On December 5, unidentified individuals threw an eight-meter (26-foot) menorah into the river in Uzhhorod. Representative of the Jewish community in Transcarpathia, Yuri Galbert, speaking of the vandalism said, “Uzhhorod residents, in my subjective opinion, they couldn’t have done that. I’ve already heard that there are several such cases in Ukraine. Apparently, it was coordinated in some way. I would like to know the answer to these questions from law enforcement agencies.” The vandals who overturned the Uzhhorod menorah left swastika graffiti nearby and posted a leaflet there accusing Jews of orchestrating the Holodomor. According to the local Jewish community, police initially referred to the incident as hooliganism, refusing to investigate it as a hate crime. After police identified the suspect, the prosecutor’s office charged him with committing a hate crime. The suspect entered a plea bargain and on December 30, the Uzhhorod City and District Court handed him a one-year suspended sentence.

According to sources, the ROC, including the UOC-MP, continued to describe the OCU as a “schismatic” group, despite its recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Greece, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, and the Church of Cyprus. The ROC continued to urge other Orthodox churches not to recognize the OCU. UOC-MP and OCU representatives continued to contest some parish registrations as not reflecting the true will of their congregation. The UOC-MP continued to file lawsuits aimed at challenging the process of congregations transitioning from the UOC-MP to the OCU.

On October 2, the OCU website posted Metropolitan Epiphaniy’s address to a congregation in the town of Vorzel near Kyiv. The Metropolitan spoke on the independence of his Church despite resistance from Russia, saying, “the self-proclaimed ‘older brothers’ believe that there is no Ukrainian people. We were disgraced, they tried to erase our

Church and cultural identity and destroy by famines. But with God’s help, our people persevered and proved that we are a strong and resilient nation that is working together to build its state and an independent local Church... Unfortunately, not everyone has realized the reality that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has its own canonical territory and all parishes in Ukraine belong to this Church.”

In February 2021, UGCC priest Andriy Mykhaleyko estimated in an article published by the Religious Information Service of Ukraine that the UOC-MP had approximately 12,000 registered churches, compared with the OCU, which had approximately 7,000 parishes. Of the 541 UOC-MP congregations that had joined the OCU since its creation in 2018, most were in the western and central oblasts. UOC-MP representatives, however, often contested parish reregistrations, stating some local government officials allowed individuals unaffiliated with the UOC-MP to vote in meetings to change the affiliation of local parishes to the OCU. UOC-MP representatives said such officials also helped OCU supporters take possession of disputed UOC-MP church buildings before the change of affiliation was officially registered. OCU representatives accused the UOC-MP of contesting legitimate changes of parish affiliation, including through numerous lawsuits. They said these suits were part of the UOC-MP’s strategy to discourage OCU followers from joining the new Church. According to the government and the OCU, the UOC-MP often falsely described eligible voters at such congregation meetings as unaffiliated with the parish, saying they rarely or never participated in religious services. These lawsuits remained unresolved through year’s end.

According to the UOC-MP, some local authorities continued to transfer parish affiliations from the UOC-MP to the OCU against the will of parishioners. According to the UOC-MP, almost all voting in favor of the OCU was illegitimate and “against the will of the parishioners.” In September, social media posts by Right Sector, commonly characterized as a violent radical group, stated that since 2014, it had helped members of approximately 50 UOC-MP congregations leave the “church of occupiers” and join the former Kyiv Patriarchate, and then the OCU. The group called on Ukrainians to “deal new blows” to the UOC-MP.

On April 6, the Grand Chamber of the Supreme Court in a cassation appeal upheld the Khmelnytskyi Oblast State Administration’s decision to register a statute of an OCU congregation in Sutkivtsi village that changed the parish’s affiliation from the UOC-MP to the OCU. The Grand Chamber ruling overturned separate 2020 decisions by the Kyiv City Economic Court and Northern Appellate Economic Court in favor of the congregation’s remaining UOC-MP parishioners. According to the UOC-MP’s website, in May, the head of the UOC-MP’s Legal Department, Archpriest Oleksandr Bakhov, said, “The religious community of the village of Sutkivtsi, Khmelnytskyi Oblast intends to continue to protect its rights and once again go to court.”

On April 8, the OCU stated that since 2019, the UOC-MP had initiated more than 100 lawsuits against oblast government decisions to register UOC-MP congregations that joined the OCU. The UOC-MP stated that local residents not belonging to respective UOC-MP parishes should not have been allowed to vote on the change of affiliation.

According to the UOC-MP, on May 10, OCU supporters seized a UOC-MP church in Zabolotta village, Rivne Oblast, following a two-year church ownership dispute between residents remaining in the UOC-MP parish and those who had joined a newly created OCU congregation in 2019. Members of the OCU rejected the accusation, saying the church’s congregation had lawfully changed its affiliation from the UOC-MP to the OCU, and that the UOC-MP had therefore lost its ownership rights of the building. Two OCU supporters reportedly discharged fire extinguishers and noxious gas at their opponents, who tried to enter the disputed church where the OCU parishioners were holding a religious service. Members of the OCU congregation left the church building when police arrived at the scene and deescalated the situation. According to the *RivneNews* website, a local news outlet, approximately one dozen persons sought medical assistance after the skirmish. One of them was hospitalized. The local authorities sealed the church entrance pending a court decision on the church affiliation dispute.

According to the UOC-MP, on February 22, approximately 350 representatives from village parishes who were split on the proposed change of affiliation from the UOC-MP to the OCU met at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the UOC-MP’s headquarters. Many representatives gave speeches detailing what they described as the seizure of their parish and their efforts to build new UOC-MP churches cosponsored by the “Favor” (Tabor) Fund. According to the UOC-MP, the fund had helped build new UOC-MP churches in dozens of communities. At the February 22 meeting, parishioners from Zadubrivka village in Chernivtsi Oblast spoke about their three-year efforts to protect their parish from the OCU. According to priest Vitaliy Durov, the rector of St. Michael’s the Archangel Church, after a May 2020 attack in which the UOC-MP successfully defended its parish from the OCU, the UOC-MP had grown stronger, and more worshippers attended church regularly. Durov said that despite threats, discrimination, and insults such as being called “Muscovites,” “we continue to live.”

On March 13, the UOC-MP-linked Union of Orthodox Journalists reported that six OCU supporters attacked a parishioner in Zadubrivka village because of his affiliation with the UOC-MP. According to UOC-MP-linked media, the rector, Vitaliy Durov, said the attack stemmed from a conflict between the late grandfather of one of the attackers and the former rector, Archpriest Leonid Delikatny of St. Michael’s the Archangel Church. According to a March 23 report by the *Dukhovny Front* (Spiritual Front) media outlet, the police report concluded the assault occurred at the hands of a group of inebriated teenagers, who were offended that the victim would not drink with them. The victim of the attack, however, stated, “with respect to this statement, the village is divided [between OCU and UOC-MP], and everything that is happening has religious grounds.”

The ownership dispute between UOC-MP and OCU members in Zadubrivka village concerning St Michael’s the Archangel Church also continued in the courts. On May 12, the Zastavna District Court rejected a UOC-MP petition to revoke the registration of a newly created OCU parish in Zadubrivka and to transfer ownership of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel from the UOC-MP to the OCU. On July 29, the Chernivtsi Appellate Court overturned the May 12 ruling and referred the case to the Kyiv City Economic Court, where it remained pending at year’s end.

There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments; Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries; and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls. According to the *Svoboda.fm* news website, on the eve of Metropolitan Epiphaniy’s visit to Chernihiv on October 21, unidentified individuals overturned a cross at a site designated for construction of an OCU church. According to the OCU, on July 13, unidentified persons damaged a statue of the Virgin Mary near an OCU church in Kyiv’s Vynohradar District.

AUCCRO and AUCRA continued to meet regularly to promote religious diversity and discuss issues affecting the country, such as the continued COVID-19 pandemic, the religious situation in the temporarily occupied territories in the eastern part of the country, and peacemaking efforts in the Donbas. AUCCRO is an interfaith organization representing more than 90 percent of all religious groups in the country, including the OCU, UOC-MP, UGCC, RCC, All-Ukraine Baptist Union, Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Pentecostal Christians, Ukrainian Union Conference, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church, Ukrainian Lutheran Church, Ukrainian Evangelical Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Ukrainian Diocese, Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine, German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, Ukrainian Bible Society, and the Trans-Carpathian Reformed Church. The council rotates its chairmanship.

On December 15-16, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine sponsored the third annual Kyiv Jewish Forum to highlight the global fight against antisemitism. The conference featured speeches by prominent Jewish leaders from around the world, including President Zelenskyy, President of Israel Herzog, the U.S. Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the President of the World Jewish Congress, and Soviet-era dissident and human rights activist Natan Sharansky. Panel discussions addressed opportunities and challenges for the Jewish world in 2022, combatting antisemitism and hate speech, and empowering the next generation of Jewish leaders through education.

In October, Limmud FSU, an international organization working with the Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora, hosted a four-day festival celebrating Jewish life in Lviv. Mayor Andriy Sadovyy provided a video recorded welcome. This was the first event Limmud FSU sponsored in the country, and it focused partly on giving young adults the opportunity to revitalize and restore Jewish learning and to strengthen Jewish identity in their communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials, including the Charge d’Affaires, met with officials of the Office of the President, Ministries of Culture, Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs, members of parliament, political parties, and local officials to engage on issues of religious freedom. They discussed the importance of fair and transparent treatment of religious groups following the establishment of the OCU, the preservation of religious heritage sites, support for religious minorities, and combating antisemitism.

In meetings with government officials at both the national and local levels, the Charge d’Affaires, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and the chairman for the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad called for unequivocal condemnation and swift prosecution of antisemitic acts. The Charge d’Affaires, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and the Chairman for the U.S. Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad also urged government officials to increase their efforts to ensure the preservation of historic religious sites and called for the government to protect the right of all religious groups to freely practice their religions according to their beliefs.

In May in Kyiv, the Secretary of State met with OCU leadership to discuss pressure on the OCU in Crimea and occupied territories of eastern Ukraine. He and Metropolitan Epiphaniy laid flowers at a memorial to Ukrainian soldiers killed in the war in the east and toured St. Michael’s Monastery (the OCU headquarters).

On October 6, the Secretary of State provided a video statement aired at the 80th anniversary commemoration of the Babyn Yar Massacre. In his speech, he reminded the audience of the tragedy at Babyn Yar, saying, “For much of the last eight decades, the world did not remember what happened at Babyn Yar. That was by design.” His speech recounted his stepfather’s personal connection to Babyn Yar and ended with, “So on this anniversary, we honor the memory of all those lost at Babyn Yar, recommit ourselves to ensuring that their full history is told, and pledge to act, every day, so that history is not repeated.”

The Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and embassy officials also participated in the 80th anniversary commemorations of the 1941 Babyn Yar Massacre to honor the victims and to emphasize the importance of preserving the memory of that tragedy.

The embassy continued to engage with leaders of AUCCRO, which represents most religious groups in the country, to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country and religious persecution in the Russia-occupied territories. The meetings were an occasion for Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders to express their

concerns about the state of religious freedom in the country and the status of religion in the temporarily occupied territories of eastern Ukraine and Crimea, and to hear views on how the United States could further help promote religious freedom.

In October, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues and the Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad traveled to the country to discuss the preservation of Jewish heritage sites and efforts to promote Holocaust memorial efforts. They traveled to Lviv and Uman to discuss those cities’ efforts to preserve their rich Jewish heritage and to express concern about construction on historical Jewish cemeteries. The Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with both the Lviv mayor and officials of the Ministry of Culture to express concern about the continued construction of a private clinic occurring on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery in Lviv. They also met with Jewish community members to discuss community views on religious freedom and what Jewish leaders considered to be an appropriate commemoration of the Holocaust, and with government officials to stress the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and the preservation of historical Jewish heritage sites. The October visit followed on the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues’ virtual visit in March, when she met online with members of the Jewish community and government officials about the preservation of Jewish heritage sites and efforts to promote Holocaust memorial efforts.

The embassy continued to engage with Jewish religious leaders and organizations to discuss issues of antisemitism and to promote Holocaust memorial efforts. In January, the Charge d’Affaires gave video remarks to an audience of Holocaust survivors, family members, and other members of the diplomatic community at the official Holocaust memorial event “Six Million Hearts.” She also gave remarks at a separate Holocaust memorial event organized by members of the Kyiv Jewish community, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv Jonathan Benjamin Markovitch, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine Osnat Lubrani, and members of parliament. In both speeches, she reiterated U.S. government support for Jewish Ukrainians in their fight for equality, tolerance, and acceptance within society, and its commitment to always protect the most vulnerable members of religious communities from violence and hatred. The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy officials participated in Hanukkah and other Jewish holiday events and Holocaust commemorations during which they emphasized the importance of religious dialogue and equality and encouraged efforts to combat antisemitism and preserve cultural heritage, including an ancient Jewish cemetery in Lviv.

On August 23, the U.S. Secretary of Energy spoke at the government-hosted Crimea Platform Summit to affirm U.S. support for the country, including “restoring control of Crimea to Ukraine and holding Russia accountable for its human rights abuses on the peninsula.”

Although embassy officials had no access to Russia-controlled or occupied territories in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, the embassy continued its outreach to religious representatives from these areas and on several occasions publicly condemned Russia’s continued measures to impede the exercise of religious freedom there. The Charge d’Affaires and embassy officials met with Crimean Tatars, both internally displaced persons and those who had come to mainland Ukraine, including lawyers, family members of political prisoners, and representatives of the Crimean Tatar community residing in Kherson and Kyiv Oblasts. Embassy officials continued to denounce the persecution of Crimean Tatars and Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as the continued harassment of officials of the OCU seeking to operate in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

Embassy officials met with representatives of Jehovah’s Witnesses to discuss their treatment in the country.

The embassy continued to use social media to reiterate U.S. government support for religious freedom, including the rights of religious minorities. It regularly highlighted religious holidays and responded to the systematic mistreatment of religious minorities in Crimea and the Russia-controlled regions in eastern Ukraine. On October 27, the embassy posted a Facebook message stating, “On International Religious Freedom Day, the United States celebrates the tolerance and openness that encourage religious freedom to thrive across Ukraine. We urge Russia’s occupying forces in Crimea and its proxies in the Donbas to allow Crimean Tatars, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and all others to worship freely without fear or influence.” In December, the embassy condemned the series of acts of vandalism of public menorahs during Hanukkah.

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