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## USDOS – US Department of State

### 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ukraine

#### Read a Section: Ukraine

##### [CRIMEA](#)

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.

#### 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. In November and December, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) issued judgments concerning the ineffective investigation of hate crimes committed against Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ukraine between 2009 and 2013. Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to report attacks on their followers that went unpunished and detentions of members reportedly for draft evasion. In April, the Ombudsperson’s Office reportedly informed oblast state administrations that the right to alternative service was “of absolute nature” and could not be rejected solely because a conscientious objector had missed the application deadline. 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 – 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, Russia continued to use a disinformation campaign to fuel further conflict between the two churches. Whereas in the past the government of then-President Petro Poroshenko promoted the OCU by encouraging local governments to facilitate parish reregistration from the UOC-MP to the OCU, Serhiy Trofimov, first deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s office, reportedly discouraged local governments from such reregistration. According to the UOC-MP, on August 6, several dozen people damaged a fence surrounding the house of a local Zolochiv UOC-MP priest; many observers characterized them as representatives of National Corps, a far-right and sometimes violent political organization. The attackers sprayed the fence with graffiti criticizing the parish’s affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) that read, “ROC out!” and “Blood is on your hands.” In August, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy ordered a local developer to halt construction of a private clinic in a protected heritage area on the grounds of an historical Jewish cemetery in Lviv, but local authorities did not halt construction, stating it was not taking place on the Jewish cemetery. According to observers, government investigations and prosecution of vandalism against religious sites were generally inconclusive, although the government condemned attacks, including physical attacks, on Jewish pilgrims in Uman and arson and other attacks on synagogues, 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 (regions) 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), a majority of religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law continued to be unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under Russian law preventing or discouraging reregistration of many religious communities. Many religious groups continued to refuse to reregister because they did not recognize the Russia-installed authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk. All but one mosque remained closed in Russia-controlled Donetsk. Russia-led forces continued to use religious buildings of minority religious groups as military facilities. The situation in Russia-occupied Crimea is reported in an appendix following the report on the rest of Ukraine.

The 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 accused the newly formed 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 four documented violent acts of anti-Semitism during the year, compared with none since 2016. There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments; Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries; and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls. 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, and members of parliament to discuss the importance of fair and transparent treatment of religious groups following the establishment of the OCU, preservation of religious heritage sites, support for religious minorities, and combating increasing manifestations of anti-Semitism. 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 urge religious groups to resolve property disputes peacefully and through dialogue with government officials, in particular the 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 August, embassy officials met with Metropolitan Klyment and discussed the pressures on his Church in Crimea.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 44 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the annual October national survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, an independent public policy think tank, 62.3 percent of respondents identify as Christian Orthodox, compared with 64.9 percent in 2019; 9.6 percent Greek Catholic (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, UGCC), compared with 9.5 percent in 2019; 1.5 percent Protestant, compared with 1.8 in 2019; 1.2 percent Roman Catholic, compared with 1.6 percent in 2019; 0.1 Jewish, compared with 0.1 percent in 2019; and 0.5 percent Muslim, compared with under 0.1 percent in 2019. The survey found another 8.9 percent identify as “simply a Christian,” while 15.2 percent state they do not belong to any religious group, compared with 8 percent and 12.8 percent, respectively, in 2019. Small numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, 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 62.3 percent who identify as Christian Orthodox are as follows: 18.6 percent as members of the new OCU, compared with 13.2 percent in 2019; 13.6 percent the UOC-MP, compared with 10.6 percent in 2019; 2.3 percent Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), compared with 7.7 percent in 2019; 27 percent “just an Orthodox believer,” compared with 30.3 percent in 2019; and 0.7 percent undecided, compared with 3.1 percent in 2019. According to the same poll, most of the self-identified OCU followers are in the western, central, and southern parts of the country. Most UOC-MP followers are in the eastern, central, and western 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 central 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, and Zakarpattia Oblasts, in the western part of the country. According to the government’s estimate released in March 2019, most OCU congregations (formed by the merger of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, 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 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. 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.

There are also small numbers of Buddhists, 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, 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.”

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.” By law, the production and dissemination of Nazi symbols and propaganda of totalitarian regimes are banned and considered a crime.

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 replaced the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport during the year, the government agency responsible for religious affairs, or with regional government authorities, depending upon the nature of the organization. Religious centers, administrations, monasteries, religious brotherhoods, missions, and religious schools register with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. Religious congregations register with the regional authorities where they are present. While these religious 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; rather, the constituent units register individually and obtain legal-entity status. 2019 amendments to the laws on the freedom of conscience and religious organizations and on state registration of legal entities, natural persons, and civic organizations direct regional governments’ religious affairs departments to enter religious organizations into the State Register of Legal Entities database, in addition to registering their statutes. They 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.

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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, 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 Ministry of Defense defines selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains, the status of chaplains in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the armed forces, National Guard, and State Border Guard Service. By law, UOC-MP priests are prohibited from serving as chaplains on bases or in conflict zones, ostensibly due to concerns about their affiliation with Russia through the Moscow Patriarchate.

The law gives prison chaplains access to both pretrial detainees and sentenced inmates. It also protects the confidentiality of confessions heard by prison chaplains, prohibits the use of information received during confession as evidence in legal proceedings, and does not allow the interrogation of clerics, interpreters, or other persons about matters associated with the confidentiality of confession.

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 allow religious head coverings in passport and other identification 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. Christian, Islamic, and Jewish-focused curriculums are offered as part of the ethics of faith curriculum 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 the 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.

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 organizations. By law, foreign religious workers may “preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,” but they may do so only for the 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 with regard to 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

On November 12 and December 17, the ECHR issued judgments concerning the ineffective investigation of hate crimes committed against Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ukraine between 2009-2013 in the cases *Zagubnya and Tabachkova v. Ukraine*, *Migoryanu and Others v. Ukraine*, *Kornilova v. Ukraine*, and *Tretiak v. Ukraine*. The court held that there were violations of Article 3 (prohibition of torture), Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) taken in conjunction with Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and it ordered the government to pay the victims 21,200 euros (\$26,000) in total compensation.

Jehovah’s Witnesses called on the government to fully implement the four ECHR rulings to ensure effective investigation of the hate crimes committed against their group and their places of worship, and to prosecute the perpetrators of those religiously motivated attacks. They estimated that during 2016-19 there were 54 such attacks, but none of the attackers had been convicted of a religiously motivated offense. Jehovah’s Witnesses also urged the government to address the “endemic” problem of ECHR judgments “falling beyond the scope of the individual cases.”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on August 2, Oleh Rybak repeatedly struck 71-year-old Witness Monica Shushko on the neck and back, calling her a derogatory term for Jehovah’s Witnesses, in Borodianka, Kyiv Oblast. Local police reportedly did not investigate the case, and Rybak remained unpunished.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on February 15, an individual in Kyiv threatened Nina Potapova with a gun, demanding that she stop her religious activity. Potapova filed a crime report but received no response from the police.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on February 7, Ruslan Panasenکو pushed Olena Mazur and Danyila Ponomariova out of his house in Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast, after learning they were Jehovah’s Witnesses. He also kicked each of the women in the thigh. Although Panasenکو reportedly admitted in court that his actions were provoked by his lack of interest in the victims’ preaching and that he wanted to “shoot” all Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Kramatorsk City Court described his actions as motivated by “sudden personal hostility” to the victims. The court sentenced Panasenکو to 200 hours of community service under charges of “minor bodily injury” and did not qualify the assault as a religiously motivated offense.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on January 26, a Poltava resident punched Olena and Valentyna Melandovych in the face when they tried to share their religious beliefs. The victims reportedly filed a crime report, but law-enforcement authorities did not detain or prosecute the attacker.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, conscientious objection was not uniformly recognized. While courts and the Parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsperson protected the right of Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objectors to perform alternative civilian service, some military enlistment officials “arbitrarily” detained young Witnesses to call them up for military duty or denied them the right to alternative service. At times, district and oblast state administration officials denied Witnesses access to alternative civilian service. Some Jehovah’s Witnesses were reportedly detained for days facing criminal prosecution for “draft evasion,” in some cases because they had missed the application deadline to apply for alternative service as conscientious objectors. On April 23, the Ombudsperson’s Office reportedly informed the oblast state administrations that the right to alternative service was “of absolute nature,” and thus could not be limited by any deadlines. It criticized the practice of not providing alternative civilian service to a conscientious objector solely due to a missed application deadline.

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. The following conscientious objectors reportedly received such refusals: Tymofii Zdorovenko (Oleksandria; March), Pavlo Kuts (Avdiivka; June), Nazar Duda (Lviv; October), Ihor Romanov (Bratske; October), Oleksii Haran (Cherkasy; October), Mykyta Kamin (Kyiv; November), Dmytro Tyshkovets (Volodymyrets; November) and Davyd Terendii (Lviv; November).

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on December 10, the Ternopil District Administrative Court ruled that Jehovah’s Witness Ihor Zhrebetskyi’s conscription into military service was unjustified because he had applied for alternative service.

On November 17, military enlistment officers reportedly detained Jehovah’s Witness Oles Tytokhod at his home, threatened him with prosecution for draft evasion, and escorted him to two local military registration enlistment offices. He was released after a 10-day detention.

On October 28, military enlistment officers reportedly escorted Jehovah’s Witness Matvii Pikalov to the Lviv Regional Military Registration and Enlistment Office and detained him for three days without cause.

On October 21, military enlistment officers reportedly escorted Jehovah’s Witness Ivan Nikitin to the Khmelnytsky Regional Military Registration and Enlistment Office, although he had been granted permission for alternative service. He was released after a nine-hour detention following his lawyer’s intervention.

On October 6, military enlistment officers reportedly escorted Jehovah’s Witness Nazar Duda to the Lviv Regional Military Registration and Enlistment Office, forging a statement on his behalf that he agreed to serve in the military. Duda was detained for three days, despite his statement that he was a conscientious objector. Duda was released after his relatives reported his detention to a prosecutor and his lawyer filed a complaint.

On October 16, military enlistment officers reportedly tried to deliver a conscription notice to Jehovah’s Witness Dmytro Tyshkovets, who had previously applied for alternative service. When Tyshkovets refused to receive the notice, stating that he was a conscientious objector, the officers accused him of draft evasion and referred the case to the police. Police opened an investigation, which continued through year’s end.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on September 10, the Brody District State Administration rejected Vladyslav Prystupa’s application for alternative civilian service, saying he was not baptized as a Jehovah’s Witness. On February 13, the Yuzhnoukrainsk City Council refused Bohdan Boyko’s application for alternative civilian service, stating he was not a baptized Jehovah’s Witness. Authorities reportedly charged him with draft evasion and, on August 25, rejected Boyko’s second application.

Following the election of President Zelenskyy in 2019, the government restructured the bodies governing religious affairs. On February 26, the administration appointed Olena Bogdan, a sociology professor, as head of the newly formed State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, an entity subordinate to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. Then-Culture Minister Volodymyr Borodyansky selected Bogdan, stating he “was looking for the most independent person,” adding, “I was looking for an agnostic because the person must implement a well-balanced policy of the government in that area.” Observers characterized this nomination as the administration’s signaling it would adopt a more neutral stance on religious issues than had former President Poroshenko, who promoted the OCU. Bogdan’s predecessor, Andriy Yurash, had led the Department for Nationalities and Religions. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy said the State Service would pursue the implementation of policy developed by the ministry. In a February 19 interview with the Religious Information Service of Ukraine, Bogdan

said the Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience would focus on the following priorities: monitoring, raising public awareness, promoting unity in diversity through dialogue, and streamlining and increasing transparency of registration of religious organizations.

In September, the Cabinet of Ministers created a new Department for Religions and Ethnic Minorities in its Secretariat, led by Yurash. This department served as a liaison between the Cabinet of Ministers and religious groups.

According to the International Center for Law and Religious Studies, the government at times continued to struggle to manage tensions between the OCU and the UOC-MP, which competed for members and parishes. The *Orthodox Times*, self-characterized as an independent news and information portal, stated that Russia continued to use a disinformation campaign to fuel further conflict between the two churches. According to sources, the UOC-MP continued to question the legitimacy of the OCU and said the OCU was “stealing” its property. The OCU said the UOC-MP was legally challenging the reregistration of parishes from the UOC-MP to the OCU. The Moscow Patriarchate also created its own webpage, *In Defense of the Unity of the Russian Church*, dedicated to amplifying ROC criticism of the OCU and to favoring the UOC-MP. OCU officials criticized first deputy head of the Office of the President Serhiy Trofimov, who oversaw regional policy, as favoring the UOC-MP by “hampering” the reregistration of former UOC-MP parishes seeking to join the OCU. On November 4, President Zelenskyy reassigned Trofimov to the role of presidential advisor. In an April 10 interview with the online news site *Glavcom*, Trofimov stated the government had not ordered and would never seek to halt the reregistration of UOC-MP congregations joining the OCU. He said that in response to “many” UOC-MP-reported instances of “unlawful” reregistration and “pressure,” the Office of the President directed the oblast state administrations to ensure compliance with the law. Trofimov also condemned attempts by UOC-MP opponents to label the UOC-MP as the “Moscow Church.”

On April 19, the Constitutional Court began to review a petition by a group of members of parliament questioning the constitutionality of the 2018 amendments to the law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations. The amendments required the UOC-MP, formally registered as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), to rename itself to reflect its affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate (Russian Orthodox Church). The lawsuit and a 2019 Supreme Court ruling in a separate suit by the UOC-MP Metropolitan Administration against the amendments that suspended the government’s implementation of the amendments prevented the government from enforcing the name change requirement for 267 UOC-MP religious organizations. The organizations were a third party in the lawsuit filed by the UOC-MP Metropolitan Administration.

In an April 10 interview with *Glavcom*, Serhiy Trofimov described the renaming requirement as “pressure” on the UOC-MP. On November 24, head of the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience Bogdan told the Interfax-Ukraine news agency the State Service would comply with any Constitutional Court ruling on the renaming requirement.

Some Jewish community representatives and the Israeli Ambassador criticized decisions by some parliamentarians and government authorities to commemorate and honor 20th century Ukrainian figures and organizations who were also associated with anti-Semitism and the killing of thousands of Jews and Poles during World War II.

On September 4, the Lviv City Council transferred for permanent use by the UGCC a plot of land that included the St. George’s Cathedral and the cathedral gardens. The UGCC thanked the Lviv authorities for their “courageous restoration of historical justice” in returning the main shrine of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics. On April 29, the Odesa City Council transferred to the RCC ownership of a plot of land in the city surrounding the Church’s Assumption Cathedral.

On January 31, media reported the State Migration Service (SMS) and armed police officers profiled individuals in the vicinity of the mosque of the Islamic Cultural Center, one of Kyiv’s largest mosques, during Friday prayers and checked the registration documents of those they identified as worshippers. The mosque belongs to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (Umma). According to Said Ismagilov, Mufti of Umma, authorities detained 25 persons who did not have their passports with them. The SMS stated that during its inspection, it identified 15 foreigners who were violating the immigration law. It also said it “treats religious and ethnic minorities with respect.” According to SMS officials, the identification inspection was part of its efforts to detect illegal migrants, and police were involved to protect SMS officers. Umma reported the SMS inspected documents of individuals arriving and departing the mosque courtyard. The SMS and police officers did not enter the mosque to conduct their inspection. On February 1, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport posted a statement saying the timing and venue of the inspection raised both ethical and legal questions. The ministry assured the Muslim community of the government’s support. It also called on the SMS to cooperate and said it was willing to facilitate SMS dialogue with religious organizations. On February 7, Muslim community representatives held a protest near the SMS offices. They said the “shameful” and “humiliating” inspection in front of a mosque on a Friday, a sacred day of worship, was an expression of a “biased and xenophobic attitude” toward Muslims.

According to the Kolomyia Jewish community, on February 11, Mykhailo Bank, chief of the Strategic Investigations Department of the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast police, requested that the Orthodox Jewish community provide police with its members’ names, addresses, and phone numbers, citing a need to counter “ethnic” and “transnational crime groups.” The head of the city’s Jewish community declined the request. According to United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU), German and Azerbaijani ethnic groups received the same registration

requests. The National Police chief launched an investigation and apologized to the Jewish community. Forty members of parliament sent a letter to the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior demanding Bank's resignation. On May 15, following an investigation of the matter, the Ministry of Internal Affairs dismissed Bank.

According to media, on July 10, the Zolochiv Municipal Council, Lviv Oblast, announced local UOC-MP supporters would not be allowed to build a church in the town because “many” UOC-MP representatives had supported Russia's war against Ukraine. The council requested that parliament ban the UOC-MP nationwide and asked law enforcement agencies to halt what it described as “illegal” construction. On July 14, a gathering of local residents initiated by the municipal government adopted a resolution supporting the council's decision. In a Facebook post on July 13, Lviv Oblast State Administration chairman Maksym Kozysky admitted that while the UOC-MP congregation had the right to unregistered worship in the home of a local UOC-MP priest, it was “immoral” to build a Moscow-affiliated church in Lviv Oblast. Members of this congregation reportedly had held religious services on private property because, they said, local government was hostile towards the UOC-MP congregation in Zolochiv. On July 13, Radio Svoboda quoted the chief of the Religions and Nationalities Department of the Oblast State Administration as saying that the owner of the property had the right to build a church on her land.

According to the UOC-MP, tensions in Zolochiv escalated on August 6 when several dozen representatives of the group National Corps damaged a fence surrounding the house of the local UOC-MP priest. The attackers sprayed the fence with graffiti criticizing the parish's affiliation with the ROC that read, “ROC out!” and “Blood is on your hands.” On September 28, two unidentified persons threw paint on the walls of a trailer installed at the site and reportedly threatened the priest, stating he would “burn” if he did not leave the town. The Lviv branch of the National Corps posted video footage of the August 6 vandalism on its website, blaming the “church of occupiers” (UOC-MP) for conducting “unlawful and undeclared” religious services. The statement described the UOC-MP as a “hostile entity” that “has no place on Ukrainian soil.” On August 15 and September 28, unidentified individuals spray-painted a store rented by a local UOC-MP member with the words, “Sponsor of the ROC.” According to the media, in September, police opened a criminal investigation of a UOC-MP complaint that the Zolochiv mayor and several other local officials were inciting religious hatred.

In Zhydychn village, Volyn Oblast, UOC-MP members built a makeshift church after part of the congregation voted to transfer the affiliation of a permanent parish church from UOC-MP to OCU. In 2019, UOC-MP parish priest Volodymyr Geleta reportedly fired shots during a dispute over the affiliation of the permanent building.

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

On January 22, the Kyiv Sixth Appellate Court upheld a request by UOC-MP Bishop Gedeon (given name, Yuriy Kharon) to renew his Ukrainian citizenship. In March, the bishop returned to Ukraine. In 2019, the government barred the dual Ukraine-U.S. citizen's return to Ukraine from the United States by stripping him of Ukrainian citizenship. The SMS said the decision was based on the SBU recommendations and the fact that Gedeon had falsified information on his citizenship application, stating Gedeon said he had lost his passport when he had it in his possession. Gedeon described the ban as retaliation for criticizing the government's “pressure” on the UOC-MP during his meetings with members of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, pursuant to a 2019 judgment by the ECHR, on July 29, the Kryvyi Rih City Council granted Jehovah's Witnesses a plot of land for construction of a Kingdom Hall. On November 11, the city council refused to allow Jehovah's Witnesses to design the Kingdom Hall, stating that such permission would violate a zoning plan. Jehovah's Witnesses requested that the council adjust the plan. The request was under consideration at year's end.

During the year, the Church of Jesus Christ worked on plans to construct a temple in Kyiv. In 2019, the Supreme Court upheld an appeal by representatives of the Church filed against the Kyiv City Council for the council's refusal to reinstate a lease on land to build a house of worship. The city government subsequently respected the Supreme Court's decision, reinstating full rights to the land.

Small religious groups stated local authorities continued to discriminate with regard to 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.

According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), on August 28, in a move to contain the spread of COVID-19, the government closed the country's borders for the month of September and extended domestic quarantine regulations by two months. Some observers noted the border closure prevented thousands of Hasidic Jews from traveling to Uman, Cherkasy Oblast, to celebrate Rosh Hashanah on September 18-20 at the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. Uman mayor Oleksander Tsebriy made several disparaging remarks about the annual Hasidic pilgrimage. Observers said the escalation of negative rhetoric was likely a strategic decision of his reelection campaign, which he subsequently lost. In addition to his social media activities encouraging the cancellation of the pilgrimage because, he said, of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tsebriy camped outside President Zelenskyy's Kyiv office in August to demand he cancel the event. Tsebriy stated his own polling found that “94 percent of Uman's residents were against the traditional pilgrimage of Rosh Hashanah, although they have nothing against the pilgrims

themselves.” Some members of the Jewish community suggested that the mayor opposed the annual Hasidic pilgrimage in general and that his efforts to restrict the pilgrimage were not based on concerns of COVID-19 but rather hostility towards Jewish pilgrims.

Kyiv’s Muslim community said the local government, which allocates land for cemeteries, had still not acted on the community’s request in 2017 for additional free land in Kyiv for Islamic burials, which was their legal right. Muslim community leaders said they were running out of land for burials. 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 to address 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 continued problems and delays reclaiming property seized by the former Communist regime. They said a review of claims often took far longer than the month prescribed by law. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups stated a number of 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. Religious groups continued to report local officials taking sides in property restitution disputes, such as the case of the Lviv City government’s continued denial of RCC requests for restitution of several properties turned over to the UGCC.

Muslim community leaders again expressed concern over the continued lack of resolution of restitution claims involving historic mosques in Mykolaiv, in the southern part of the country. The Soviet-era government had seized the property and it remained publicly owned at year’s end.

The government continued to take no action in response to previous requests from religious communities to impose a moratorium on the privatization of religious buildings confiscated by the then-Soviet government, according to civil society activists and religious organizations.

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. Local officials stated it was impossible to ban digging on privately-owned land and that Uman had been a densely populated residential area since Soviet times.

The Jewish community continued to express concern about the ongoing operation of the Krakivskyy Market on the grounds of an historical Jewish cemetery in Lviv. On August 26, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy ordered a local developer to halt construction of a private clinic at the protected site. Despite the ministry’s order, Lviv authorities did not halt the construction. According to some Lviv authorities, the construction was not on the Jewish cemetery part of the land. According to Jewish community representatives, they feared the Lviv government would sell more of the public land to private groups, which could lead to further concerns about protecting the cemetery. The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) urged the government to halt permanently the construction of a multistory commercial building on the cemetery grounds, separate from the clinic, that had been ordered suspended in 2017.

The UCSJ and civic activists continued to express concern over 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 returned to the site. Lviv authorities denied the construction had unearthed any remains.

On November 16, the Lviv Appellate Court revoked the Lviv City Council’s decision to provide land to a developer for the construction of an office building at the site of a synagogue destroyed at Syanska Street in Lviv during the Nazi occupation. In 2019, the developer had halted construction at the Lviv city government’s order, following protests by heritage-protection activists. Jewish community representatives said they were cautiously optimistic the construction over the destroyed synagogue would not occur.

Jewish community leaders said they continued to experience difficulties with the Ternopil Municipal and District governments with regard to 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.

Some Jewish leaders and human rights activists continued to state their concerns about what they considered impunity for hate crimes, including acts of anti-Semitism, and about the government’s long delays in completing investigations of these 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 anti-Semitic actors, if apprehended, with hooliganism or vandalism instead of a hate crime in what they assessed as the country’s attempt to downplay the level of anti-Semitism.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on August 30, September 12, 21, and 27, October 17, and December 12 and 27, unidentified individuals wrote the word “sect” on the fence surrounding a Kingdom Hall in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, Volyn Oblast. Police instituted criminal proceedings regarding only one of the seven incidents. The case remained pending at year’s end.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on November 16, unidentified individuals set fire to a sign saying “Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses” on the wall of the house of worship on Romen Rollan Street, in Kyiv. Police initially refused to open an investigation, but the investigative judge ordered them to do so. The case remained pending at year’s end.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on March 20 and 25, unidentified individuals painted neo-Nazi symbols and the word “sect” on the walls of a Kingdom Hall in Skadovsk, Zaporizhya Oblast. Police refused to institute criminal proceedings, but the investigative judge ordered them to start an investigation. The case remained pending at year’s end.

On July 29, President Zelenskyy met via video conference with the privately funded Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC) Supervisory Board to discuss the construction of the future museum and memorial honoring Holocaust victims. During the meeting, Zelenskyy stressed the importance of commemorating the country’s Holocaust victims and supported the BYHMC, stating, “It would be very good if this project were brought to life and we built history together with you.” President Zelenskyy appointed Presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak to lead a planning committee to implement the project, which called for a smaller government museum to open by the 80th anniversary of the Holocaust in 2021; the larger BYHMC memorial and museum were slated to open in 2025 or 2026. On September 29, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the BYHMC signed a memorandum of cooperation. According to media, the BYHMC project drew controversy, including reports that BYHMC artistic director Ilya Khrzhanovsky may have been involved in child abuse in filming his multidisciplinary project, DAU. There were also media reports that the BYHMC’s planned construction could disturb historical Jewish and Orthodox burial grounds at the site of the massacre.

On December 13-20, the Lviv Sholom Aleichem Jewish Culture Society, supported by the government’s Ukrainian Cultural Foundation and the Lviv City Council, hosted the “Yiddish and Intercultural Dialogue Days” festival. A conference on historical heritage preservation was one of its main events.

In his address to the nation on January 22, the Day of Unity, President Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to respect persons of all ethnic minorities and religions, saying as a Ukrainian, he respected “the rights of representatives of all national minorities and all religions.”

In a September 9 *Jerusalem Post* interview, President Zelenskyy said, “We strongly condemn anti-Semitic attacks of any kind. Anti-Semitism is a poison that has no place in Ukraine.”

On October 22, the Lviv District Administrative Court overturned an SMS decision to deny refugee status to Elena Polushkina, who had sought refuge from religious persecution in Russia. The court ordered the SMS to grant Polushkina refugee status. The SMS appealed the ruling. On July 20, the Eighth Appellate Administrative Court in Lviv ordered the SMS to grant refugee status to Sevara Makhambayeva, who had sought refuge because of religious persecution in Uzbekistan.

## ACTIONS OF FOREIGN FORCES AND NONSTATE ACTORS

During the year, the conflict in eastern Ukraine continued, with parts of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts under the control of Russia-installed authorities in the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“DPR”) and “Luhansk People’s Republic” (“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. Similarly, the OCU, which competed for worshippers with the UOC-MP, continued to cite unfair treatment and persecution.

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 “LPR” continued to ban the group as an “extremist” organization, while the “Supreme Court” in the “DPR” upheld a similar ban. According to Protestant and Jehovah’s Witnesses groups, many of their members fled these areas to escape oppressive conditions and to seek greater religious freedom in government-controlled territory.

According to the OHCHR, 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.”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, 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” proxy authorities had seized 14 Kingdom Halls in Russia-controlled parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. Jehovah’s Witnesses did not know if any of these 14 Kingdom Halls or any additional halls were confiscated during the year.

**“LPR”**

“LPR” authorities continued to deny the reregistration applications of Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventists groups, in accordance with a 2018 law by “LPR” authorities that required religious communities, with the exception of the UOC-MP, who were recognized “within the framework of the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate,” to reregister with the “authorities,” and citing a 2015 decree that banned mass events while the area was under martial law. According to Forum 18, an international religious freedom NGO, in December 2019, “LPR Minister” Dmitry Sidorov said there were 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. According to Forum 18, Inna Sheryayeva, the head of the Religious Organizations and Spirituality Department of the Culture, Sport and Youth “Ministry” in Luhansk, declined to disclose whether more religious communities had their registration approved since December 2019. Similarly, officials of the registration department of the Justice “Ministry,” the entity tasked with registering religious communities, declined to disclose which communities had been allowed to register and which had been refused.

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Religious leaders continued to say their registration 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.

According to Forum 18, at the end of 2019 and continuing during the year, local “LPR” authorities cut off water, electricity, and gas supplies to unregistered places of worship, citing their inability as unofficial organizations to have utility contracts.

According to Forum 18, “LPR” authorities continued to threaten Baptist Union pastors to stop meeting for worship or risk punishment. “State Security” officers of the “LPR” continued to threaten Baptist pastor Volodymyr Rytikov with charges of extremism for continuing to lead worship services without “official” permission. On January 28, Forum 18 reported that “LPR” State Security Ministry representatives took Rytikov from his home and instructed his wife “not to tell anyone.” They brought him to the ministry branch office and questioned him about his intention to continue conducting unregistered services and distribute “extremist” literature, including the Gospel of John. “Prosecutors” also continued their investigation of OCU priest Anatoliy Nazarenko on similar extremism charges through year’s end. “LPR” authorities continued to ban many religious leaders from outside their territory from reaching their congregations, according to Forum 18.

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**“DPR”**

The “DPR’s” worship and religious associations’ law continued to ban all religious organizations that did not meet a March 1, 2019 registration deadline and to require previously registered religious groups to reregister. The law gives the “Ministry of Culture” powers 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. The “authorities” have 10 days either to put the group on the register of religious groups or to cancel its legal status. The “authorities” have a month to examine the application documents of a religious association seeking legal status. In either case, they may conduct a “state religious expert evaluation” of the documents, which could take up to six months, or deny a registration request on several grounds, including that application materials lack 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.”

According to Forum 18, “DPR” authorities denied registration to almost all religious communities, apart from the UOC-MP.

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 might be funding such events, and they publicly labeled congregations “American agents.” Protestant leaders and religious experts attributed such activities by the Russia-led “DPR” (and “LPR”) to attempts to undermine a strong prewar presence of Protestants in the region.

According to Forum 18, on January 19, “security forces” raided an unidentified Protestant community during worship, took church leaders to the police station for interrogation, and released them after two hours. “DPR” “Human Rights Ombudsperson” Darya Morozova told Forum 18 on February 10 that she was unaware of any raids on religious organizations and that there had been no written appeals to her office.

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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 an increase in anti-Semitic violence, with four such suspected cases reported during the year. Prior to these incidents, the last recorded anti-Semitic violence against individuals occurred in 2016. During the year, the NMRMG recorded eight cases of anti-Semitic vandalism, including the attempted arson of a synagogue in Kherson and the toppling of a menorah in Kyiv, compared with 14 incidents in 2019. According to the NMRMG, COVID-19 related measures encouraging citizens to stay home likely contributed to both the decrease in anti-Semitic vandalism and the increase in violent attacks. Two of the four violent attacks occurred in Uman, where tensions erupted between Uman residents and Hasidic Jews who were making a pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov during a nationwide COVID-19 lockdown.

The UJCU reported 49 cases of anti-Semitism during the year, compared with 56 cases in 2019. The difference in the count of anti-Semitic 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 anti-Jewish epithets.

According to media reports, on February 25, an inebriated individual broke into a synagogue in Vinnytsia and assaulted a congregant after shouting about “beating up the [epithet].” According to a Facebook post by Eduard Dolinsky, the director of Ukraine’s Jewish Committee, police said the man, a resident of the nearby town of Yampil, “attacked Igor Braverman, a well-known journalist and a member of the community, tried to strangle him, twisting his hands. . . spat upon the portrait of the Hafetz Haim, and crushed it.” (The Hafetz Haim was an influential rabbi who died in 1933.) According to Dolinsky, police detained the alleged attacker but did not take him into custody. An ambulance took Braverman to a hospital; he did not suffer serious injuries, according to Dolinsky. The watchdog group Monitoring Antisemitism Worldwide said the Ministry of Internal Affairs was handling the case as a hate crime. According to the local rabbi, upon his release, the man apologized to Jewish community leaders.

In January, media reported conflicting accounts of a physical altercation between Hasidic Jews and residents of Uman, in Cherkasy Oblast. According to some media reports, four Hasidim were hospitalized after a mob beat them in a “pogrom-style attack.” However, the Rabbi Nachman International Charitable Foundation, which owns the Tomb of Rabbi Nachman in Uman, stated that the conflict was exclusively domestic in nature and did not relate to interethnic hatred issues, anti-Semitism, or biased attitudes of Uman residents towards Hasidic pilgrims. According to the national police, no one sought medical help or submitted official statements to them. On January 11, city officials hosted a meeting between “local activists” and representatives of Hasidic pilgrims. On January 12, the mayor of Uman, police, and SBU officials also had a meeting with Jewish representatives and agreed that police guards would help protect the pilgrimage site, that the local government and Jewish community would work together to install more security cameras around the entire pilgrimage area, and that all sides would maintain regular contact to prevent future such incidents. The city government said that the incident had “no ethnic or religious basis whatsoever.” Then-Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Dmytro Kuleba instructed his social media followers to “always treat the ‘shocking’ emotional headlines with triple caution.”

There were two violent anti-Semitic attacks in Uman, in Cherkasy Oblast, during the Hasidic pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman. The annual pilgrimage to Uman attracted approximately 3,000 Hasidic Jews, compared with more than 30,000 in 2019. According to Michael Tkatch, the head of the UJCU, on August 31, an individual approached an Orthodox Jewish man in a supermarket in Uman, hit him in the face and caused him to bleed, and then fled the scene with a friend. Police identified the offenders and opened a criminal case. According to media, on October 18, two teenage Hasidic Israeli citizens were attacked behind the grave of Rabbi Nachman. One, a 15-year-old, was stabbed, and the other victim managed to run away. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba condemned the attack

on the teenagers. The attacker, a man in his early twenties, was identified and charged with hooliganism, punishable by three to seven years’ imprisonment. On November 12, the Cherkasy Oblast Prosecutor’s Office announced that the Uman City and District Court had convicted the attacker of hooliganism and ordered him to pay a fine of 17,000 hryvnas (\$600), but he was not sentenced to prison.

According to media, on July 28, a man armed with an axe tried to enter a synagogue in Mariupol. A security guard sustained a broken arm while successfully fending off the attacker. Law enforcement authorities identified the attacker and a Mariupol court sanctioned his arrest, but he fled to Russia. In August, Russian authorities detained him and put him in a pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don. On the Mariupol Jewish Community Facebook page, Mariupol Chief Rabbi Menachem Mendel Cohen expressed his gratitude to law enforcement agencies for their “hard work” in apprehending the perpetrator.

On May 10, the SBU and police reported the detention of two suspects who, on April 20, threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in Kherson, causing minor damage to the building. According to the SBU, the perpetrators, who supported Nazi ideology, carried out the attack to mark Hitler’s birthday. During a visit to the synagogue on June 27, President Zelenskyy and the Chief Rabbi of Kherson, Yossef Itshak Wolff, personally thanked chiefs of regional police and SBU departments for detaining the two suspects. The President said the government would protect all citizens regardless of their nationality or religion. Police took the suspects into custody and charged them with arson. Their expected court date was February 2021.

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 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.

According to the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, on December 10, a man filmed himself toppling a Hanukkah menorah in Kyiv while shouting “To Ukrainians the power, Jews to the graves.” Local media identified him as Andrey Rachkov, who posted a video of his actions on Facebook with the caption, “How to treat foreigners who are engaged in usurpation of power, occupation of territories, genocide.” A police investigation was ongoing at year’s end.

According to media, in January, a monument to the victims of the Holocaust was found defaced in Kryvyi Rih, located in the central part of the country. The suspect pled guilty to dishonoring the memorial and was sentenced to three years in prison and one year of probation.

Media reported in January the posting by a department head and economics professor at Lviv Polytechnic University of photographs of President Zelenskyy and former Prime Minister, Volodymyr Groysman, who are both Jewish, in Israel. The professor stated they were serving Israel rather than Ukraine, saying, “Their dominance in Ukraine is a problem created mainly by Ukrainians themselves.” Dolinsky, of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, posted on Facebook that the text was “like a page out of the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion,’” referencing an anti-Semitic diatribe purportedly produced by the Russian secret police in the early 20th century.

In March, law enforcement agencies brought a case to court alleging an individual had painted swastikas and anti-Semitic slurs on a Holocaust memorial in Holovanivsk, Kirovohrad Oblast, in September 2019. The suspect was charged with incitement of ethnic and religious hatred and desecration of a burial site.

In February, the Pew Research Center published findings on attitudes towards democratic principles, such as regular elections, free speech, and free civil society, as well as religious freedom, in 34 countries, based on interviews it conducted in its *Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey*. According to the findings, 59 percent of Ukrainian respondents considered religious freedom to be “very important,” ranking it among the highest of their priorities for democratic principles among the nine tested.

The ROC, including the UOC-MP, continued to describe the OCU as a “schismatic” group, despite its recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 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 its congregation.

On September 4, OCU Primate Metropolitan Epiphaniy stated that after the change of government, the UOC-MP, “often with support of certain officials,” began to actively oppose the process of congregations transitioning from the UOC-MP to the OCU. He stated that the UOC-MP had filed lawsuits to challenge “almost every” such transition. He said in most cases courts “acted fairly,” but former members of UOC-MP congregations seeking to join the OCU had “fears,” which some observers believed referred to the expected lawsuits. The Metropolitan called on the government to help protect congregations wishing to join the OCU. The UOC-MP rejected the charge of government support.

On December 15, the website *Suspilne.media* quoted OCU Metropolitan Epiphaniy as saying five UOC-MP congregations joined the OCU during the year. The Religious Information Service of Ukraine estimated that as of February, 541 (4.5 percent) of 12,122 UOC-MP congregations had joined the OCU since its creation in 2018. Most of those parishes 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 again 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. Media reports indicated that some UOC-MP priests refused to follow the will of parishioners to change affiliation. Social media posts by Right Sector, commonly characterized as a violent radical group, stated that at the request of the OCU, it continued to visit Orthodox churches disputed between the UOC-MP and OCU to “facilitate” changes in affiliation. In an interview on church reregistration, OCU Metropolitan Epiphaniy stated, “We want them to continue to be peaceful, calm, and voluntary. . . We do not need confrontation.”

According to the Chernivtsi regional police, on May 4, officers intervened to stop a violent church-ownership dispute between UOC-MP and OCU members in Zadubrivka Village. On the day the priest leading a local UOC-MP congregation died of COVID-19, OCU supporters armed with sticks and pepper spray tried to break the door lock and seize the church guarded by several UOC-MP parishioners, according to UOC-MP sources. The sources also stated that attackers beat several UOC-MP members and sprayed noxious gas at them. Two UOC-MP parishioners sustained injuries and received medical assistance at a local hospital. Before approaching the church, the OCU supporters, led by an OCU priest, cut off electricity to the neighborhood and felled a tree across a village street to hamper the arrival of police vehicles and UOC-MP supporters at the scene. Police opened an investigation but made no arrests or charges by year’s end. OCU parishioners stated that UOC-MP members had been using force to prevent them from entering the church, despite a 2019 local government decision to transfer ownership of the church to a local OCU parish. The majority of village residents had voted for the transfer, according to the OCU. On May 5, chairman of the Chernivtsi Oblast State Administration Serhiy Osachuk issued a statement calling on the two sides to resolve their differences peacefully and to comply with a future court verdict on their dispute. There was no verdict by year’s end.

The All Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO), as well as the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations (AUCRA), continued to meet regularly to discuss issues affecting the country, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the religious situation in the temporarily occupied territories, and peacemaking. AUCCRO is an interfaith organization representing more than 90 percent of all religious groups in Ukraine, including the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, 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 Trans-Carpathian Reformed Church. The council rotates its chairmanship.

On September 8-9, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine sponsored the second annual Kyiv Jewish Forum to highlight the global fight against anti-Semitism. The conference featured speeches from prominent Jewish leaders from around the world, including President Zelenskyy; Benny Gantz, Alternate Prime Minister of Israel; the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism; Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks of the United Kingdom; and Natan Sharansky, human rights activist. Panel discussions included the state of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, the legacy of Babyn Yar, and Jewish leadership in the fight against COVID-19.

## Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials, including the Charge d’Affaires, and other U.S. government officials continued to meet 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 continued to discuss 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 increasing manifestations of anti-Semitism. In meetings with government officials at both the national and local levels, the Charge d’Affaires called for unequivocal condemnation and swift prosecution of anti-Semitic acts. The Charge d’Affaires 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 January, the Secretary of State visited Kyiv and met with OCU Metropolitan Epiphaniy. After the meeting, the Secretary tweeted that he was “impressed by [Metropolitan Epiphaniy’s] efforts to ensure the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine is open to all believers. The U.S. will always champion the right of all people to worship freely.”

The embassy continued to engage with leaders of the 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 to promote religious freedom.

The embassy continued to engage with Jewish religious leaders and organizations to discuss issues of anti-Semitism and to promote Holocaust memorial efforts. In January, the Charge d’Affaires spoke to an audience of Holocaust survivors, family members, and other members of the diplomatic community at the official Ukrainian Holocaust memorial event “Six Million Hearts.” In her speech, she reiterated U.S. government support for Jewish Ukrainians in their fight for equality, tolerance, and acceptance within society, and she committed to always protect the most vulnerable members of religious communities from violence and hatred. Embassy officials also participated in the annual 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 meet with representatives from the Jewish community and assist in its efforts to preserve the country’s Jewish heritage. One of the most prominent cases was the continued construction of a private clinic on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery in Lviv. The Charge d’Affaires wrote letters to both the Lviv mayor and the Ministry of Culture expressing her concern about the construction.

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. 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.

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 anti-Semitism and preserve cultural heritage.

The embassy continued to use social media to reiterate U.S. government support for religious freedom, including the rights of religious minorities. The embassy regularly supported religious freedom through social media responses to anti-Semitic incidents across the country and to the systematic mistreatment of religious minorities in Crimea and the Russia-controlled regions in eastern Ukraine with a regular reminder of “#CrimeaisUkraine.”

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