

USDOS – US Department of State

2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Executive Summary

The constitutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and each of the country's two entities – the Federation of BiH (the Federation) and Republika Srpska (RS) – provide for freedom of religious thought and practice, prohibit religious discrimination, and allow registered religious organizations to operate freely. The self-governing Brcko District follows national law on religious freedom. The Federation constitution declares religion to be “a vital national interest” of the constituent peoples. The RS constitution establishes the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) as “the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion.” The BiH constitution reserves all positions in the Presidency and one house of parliament and certain other government offices to members of the three major ethnic groups, known as “constituent peoples” – Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks – who are predominantly SOC, Roman Catholic, and Muslim, respectively. The government again failed to comply with a 2009 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision calling on it to open these positions to other minorities, although BiH political leaders were engaged in negotiations on an electoral and limited constitutional reform package that according to international experts would have included implementation of the court's decision. At year's end, political leaders had not reached an agreement. By law, no Muslim group may register or open a mosque without the approval of the government-recognized Islamic Community. The government did not approve the reestablishment of two joint commissions required to implement agreements between the state and the Catholic Church and the SOC. Religious groups reported no progress in efforts to obtain restitution for property confiscated during the communist period. According to government officials, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) made only partial progress in implementing provisions of the national religious freedom law, including proposals to resolve the issues of rights to pension, disability allowance, and health insurance for religious officials, despite pledging to do so in 2019. The BiH Presidency again failed to consider and approve a previously negotiated agreement that would provide religious accommodations to Muslim workers. The Serb member of the Presidency stated the agreement would provide more rights to Muslims than to other communities, which the Islamic Community denied. Religious groups, in communities where they are a minority, again reported authorities discriminated against them in providing services and protection. Two courts dismissed a suit filed by a soldier in 2020 alleging religious discrimination because the Ministry of Defense prohibited her from wearing a headscarf at work. Advocates for the soldier appealed to the Constitutional Court, where the case was pending at year's end. The 2021 European Commission Report on BiH reported continued ethnic segregation and discrimination in the education system. Religious groups again reported inadequate investigation and prosecution of religiously motivated crimes. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Mission to the country, in 2020 (the most recent year for which data were available), courts adjudicated five cases involving religiously motivated incidents from 2020 and earlier.

The Interreligious Council of BiH (IRC) registered 23 reported acts of vandalism of religious buildings and three incidents against religious officials but said the number of actual incidents was likely much higher. In February, an unknown perpetrator fired gunshots at the Aladza Mosque in Foca, a national monument. In Livno Canton, several imams were verbally insulted. In May, an unknown individual sprayed graffiti insulting Jesus on the walls of the Saint Anthony Catholic Church in Bihac. In August, vandals broke the windows of an Orthodox church near Kupres and overturned the headstone of its founder. The Jewish Community reported increased online antisemitic speech. The OSCE reported 16 incidents targeting Muslims and 27 targeting Christians (Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Orthodox) in 2020 (the most recent data). The incidents, all of which were reported to police, included threats against religious believers and officials, including Catholic Cardinal Vinko Puljic, disturbances of religious ceremonies, and vandalism.

With MHRR officials, U.S. embassy representatives emphasized the need to promote respect for religious diversity and enforce equal treatment for religious minorities and the importance of concluding the agreement with the Islamic Community and implementing agreements with the SOC

and Catholic Church. Embassy officials also urged government representatives to make greater efforts on implementation of the law on religious freedom. In February, the Ambassador met with the BiH Presidency members, urging them to assist with the adoption of a framework law governing restitution of religious property confiscated under communism. In June, the Ambassador met jointly in Mostar with Bishop of Mostar Duvno Diocese Petar Palic, Mostar Mufti Salem Effendi Dedovic, and Orthodox Bishop Dimitrije, the first time in decades that these officials met together. They discussed interreligious dialogue, postwar recovery, and reconciliation. In November, the Counselor of the Department of State met with the BiH religious leaders from the Islamic Community, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish Community to discuss their perspectives on the political crisis in BiH and encourage them to take a more active role on reconciliation and peacebuilding. In regular meetings with religious groups, embassy officials continued to urge the groups to improve interreligious dialogue to help develop a peaceful and stable society. The embassy continued to maintain regular contact with the IRC and fund some of its interfaith and reconciliation-themed activities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 3.8 million (midyear 2021). According to the most recent census, conducted in 2013, Sunni Muslims constitute approximately 51 percent of the population, Serbian Orthodox Christians 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, and others, including Protestants and Jews, 3 percent.

There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion: BiH Serbs affiliate primarily with the SOC, and BiH Croats with the Catholic Church. Bosniaks are predominantly Muslim. The Jewish Community estimates it has 1,000 members, with the majority living in Sarajevo. The majority of Serbian Orthodox live in the RS, and most Muslims and Catholics in the Federation. Protestant and most other small religious communities have their largest memberships in Sarajevo and Banja Luka.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Annex IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which serves as the country's constitution, provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It stipulates no one shall be deprived of citizenship on the grounds of religion and that all persons shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms without discrimination as to religion.

The entity constitution of the Federation states all individuals shall have freedom of religion, including of public and private worship, and freedom from discrimination based on religion or creed. It defines religion as a vital national interest of the constituent peoples.

The entity constitution of the RS establishes the SOC as “the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion.” It provides for equal freedoms, rights, and duties for all citizens irrespective of religion and prohibits any incitement to religious hatred or intolerance. It specifies religious communities shall be equal before the law and free to manage their religious affairs and hold religious services, open religious schools and conduct religious education in all schools, engage in commercial activities, receive gifts, and establish and manage endowments in accordance with the law.

The self-governing Brcko District follows national law on religious freedom.

A national law on religion provides for freedom of conscience and grants legal status to “churches and religious communities.” To acquire official status as a recognized religious community, religious groups must register. The constitutions of BiH, the Federation entity, and the RS entity state that registered religious organizations are allowed to operate freely.

Unregistered religious groups may assemble to practice their religion, but they have no legal status and may not represent themselves as a religious community.

Registration affords numerous rights to religious communities that are not available to those that do not register, including the right to conduct collaborative actions such as charity work, fundraising, and constructing and occupying places of worship. The law states churches and religious communities serve as representative institutions and organizations of believers, founded in accordance with their own regulations, teachings, beliefs, traditions, and practices. The law recognizes the legal status of four “traditional” religious communities: the Islamic Community, SOC, Catholic Church, and Jewish Community. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) maintains a unified register of all religious communities, and the MHRR is responsible for documenting violations of religious freedom.

According to law, any group of 300 or more adult citizens may apply to register a new religious community or church through a written application to the MOJ. Requirements for registration include presenting statutes that define the method of religious practice and a petition for establishment with the signatures of at least 30 founders. The ministry must issue a decision within 30 days of receipt of the application. The law stipulates the ministry may deny the application for registration if it concludes the content and manner of worship may be “contrary to legal order, public morale, or is damaging to the life and health or other rights and freedoms of believers and citizens.” A group may appeal a negative decision to the BiH Council of Ministers. The law allows registered religious communities to establish their own suborganizations, which may operate without restriction.

The law states that no new church or religious community may be founded bearing the same or similar name as an existing church or religious community. The law also states no one may use the symbols, insignia, or attributes of a church or a religious community without its consent.

In addition to registered churches and religious communities, there are educational, charitable, and other institutions, known as “legal subjects,” that belong to these communities but are registered as separate legal entities in the MOJ registry. The Islamic Community has 121 legal subjects, the Catholic Church 400, the Orthodox Church 538, Jewish Community eight, and other churches and religious communities and alliances (primarily of Protestant groups) have 50.

Pursuant to a 2015 decision of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, employees of judicial institutions are prohibited from wearing any form of “religious insignia,” including headscarves, or practicing religion, such as by praying or proselytizing, at work.

The state recognizes the Islamic Community as the sole supreme institutional religious authority for all Muslims in the country, including immigrants and refugees, as well as for Bosniaks and other Muslim nationals living outside the country who accept the Islamic Community’s authority. According to the law, no Islamic group may register with the MOJ or open a mosque without the permission of the Islamic Community.

The law on religion states that churches and religious communities must pay taxes and contributions on earnings of their employees (pension, health, and disability insurance). In the Federation, two of the 10 cantons – Western Herzegovina Canton and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton – include religious officials in their health insurance system. Sarajevo Canton does not include religious workers in its health insurance system but offers such insurance to religious officials under more favorable provisions than those available to other citizens. The RS provides pension benefits and disability insurance to religious workers while they have residence there.

The criminal codes of all three BiH administrative units regulate hate crimes. The provisions in these codes define hate crimes as any criminal act committed because of religious belief or various other factors. The criminal codes also stipulate that these motivations be considered aggravating circumstances of a criminal act unless the code itself stipulates harsher punishments.

The laws of the Federation, each of the 10 Federation cantons, and the RS affirm the right of every citizen to religious education. The laws allow a representative of each of the officially registered religious communities to assume responsibility for teaching religious studies in public and private preschools, primary and secondary schools, and universities if there is sufficient demand. Religious communities select and train their respective religious education teachers, who are employees of the schools where they teach, although they receive accreditation from their respective religious institutions.

The Islamic Community, SOC, and Catholic Church develop and approve religious curricula across the country. Public schools offer religious education in the religion of the majority of the school’s students, with some exceptions.

In the Federation’s five Bosniak-majority cantons, primary and secondary schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a twice-weekly course. Alternatively, students may take a course in ethics. In cantons with Croat majorities, Croat students in primary and secondary schools may attend an elective Catholic religion course twice a week or take a course in ethics. In the five primary and 10 secondary Catholic schools spread throughout the Federation and the RS that do not have Croat majorities, parents may choose either an elective Catholic religion course or a course in ethics. The Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Education offers Orthodox and Protestant religious education in addition to classes offered to the Muslim and Catholic communities. The RS Ministry of Education offers elective Orthodox religious education in secondary schools, but students have the option to take a course in ethics. In both the RS and the Federation, as well as Brcko, students belonging to a registered religious community that is a minority in the school may enroll in a course pertaining to that religious community if there are at least 18 interested students.

The BiH constitution provides for representation of the three major ethnic groups – Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks – in the government and armed forces. The constitution makes no explicit mention of representation for religious groups, although each ethnicity mentioned by the constitution is associated with a particular religious group.

The BiH constitution reserves all positions in the House of Peoples (one of two houses of parliament) and apportions other government offices to members of the three major ethnic groups according to quotas. Members of religious minorities are constitutionally ineligible to hold a seat in the House of Peoples. The three-member Presidency must consist of one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb.

A law against discrimination prohibits exclusion, limitation, or preferential treatment of individuals based specifically on religion in employment and the provision of social services in both the government and private sectors.

The country has no law on restitution that would allow for the return of, or compensation for, property, including property owned by religious groups, nationalized or expropriated under communist rule.

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

Government Practices

According to government officials, the MHRR made only partial progress in implementing the national religious freedom law during the year. The officials said the MHRR made it easier for religious groups to carry out educational and charitable work, but the ministry did nothing to facilitate resolution of pension, disability allowance, and health insurance issues for religious officials, despite pledging to do so in 2019. The Federation, RS, and Brcko governments did not make provisions for religious officials to fully qualify for pensions and health and disability insurance, although the MHRR asked them in 2019 to work with religious group representatives to do so. In the absence of systemic solutions, the Islamic Community independently provided health benefits and pensions for its religious workers, while the RS paid those benefits to SOC religious workers.

The MOJ said it generally processed registration applications by religious groups within a week, and no religious group reported delays in registration. No groups registered during the year, and there were no reports the ministry denied any registration applications by religious communities.

On October 18, the BiH Presidency was scheduled to take up for consideration a 2015 agreement between the state and the Islamic Community that, if approved by the Presidency and parliament, would recognize and regulate Islamic dietary restrictions in public institutions, public and private sector employee accommodations for daily prayer, time off to attend Friday prayers, and time off for one-time travel to Mecca for the Hajj. Serb member of the Presidency Milorad Dodik, however, requested that the Presidency not take up the agreement, stating publicly that the agreement would grant greater rights to Muslims than to other religious groups. By year's end, the Presidency had not taken up consideration of the agreement or consulted with the Islamic Community to resolve concerns over it.

According to the MHRR, the implementation of the agreement with the SOC had likely been stalled for years due to the absence of a similar agreement between the state and the Islamic Community.

The government did not reestablish the joint commission with the Catholic Church to implement the concordat with the Holy See, a requirement after each change in government. The government and the Catholic Church nominated members for the commission, but the BiH Council of Ministers had not approved the commission by year's end. Similarly, the government failed to reestablish a joint commission to implement its agreement with the SOC; by year's end the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had not nominated a candidate to the commission, and therefore it was not submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval.

According to representatives of the Catholic Church, nonformation of the concordat commission and nonimplementation of the agreement affected pastoral care in hospitals, work with police services and prisons, health insurance for Church workers, restitution of confiscated property, compensation for the use of confiscated property, tax policy regarding the nonprofit activities of Church legal entities, financing school and charitable Church institutions, the legal status of in-kind donations to the Church, and other issues. The Catholic Church reported that government actions recommended by earlier sessions of the concordat commission, such as legislation recognizing religious holidays, had not been implemented. The commission last met in 2016.

In July, Cardinal Puljic told an Al Jazeera interviewer that he did not understand local politicians who were persistently avoiding constructive agreement on equal rights for all in BiH. He added that Croats and other Catholics, but also persons of other ethnicities and religious groups, were left on

their own, as politicians who were supposed to represent them did not act in their best interest.

On February 23, the Court of BiH rejected a 2020 complaint by a soldier, Emela Mujanovic Kapidzija, who had stated that the Ministry of Defense had discriminated against her and violated her religious freedom by prohibiting her from wearing a headscarf at work. Kapidzija filed an appeal with the Appellate Chamber of the Court of BiH, which rejected the appeal on April 19. On May 25, the Commission for Freedom of Religion of the Islamic Community filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court of BiH on her behalf. At year's end, the case was pending. Kapidzija remained a member of the Armed Forces of BiH but could not wear a headscarf at her workplace at the Ministry of Defense pending a ruling by the Constitutional Court.

On December 2, the Constitutional Court decided in favor of a petition from BiH House of Peoples Deputy Speaker Bakir Izetbegovic requesting a review of provisions of the Rules of Service in the Armed Forces of BiH prohibiting beards. The court determined in a final ruling that the ban violated the right to privacy and the right to freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution of BiH and the European Convention on Human Rights.

On June 5, the government of BiH completed demolition of a Serbian Orthodox church built without permission on the property of Bosniak returned refugee Fata Orlovic, a Muslim. The government also cleared the property of debris. The lawyer representing Orlovic confirmed the RS government paid her 5,000 euros (\$5,700) and 13 of her relatives 2,000 euros (\$2,300) each in compensation.

Leaders of the four traditional religious communities in BiH continued to say the country's lack of a law on restitution – for both religious communities and private citizens – hindered efforts of religious communities to resolve claims of properties confiscated and nationalized under communist rule from 1946 to 1965. In the absence of a restitution law, the return of property was at the discretion of local authorities, and, even if these authorities returned properties, the claimants could not receive titles to those properties. At the end of the meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Banja Luka on July 14, the bishops sent a message to BiH authorities, urging them to return confiscated property to all those who were deprived of it after World War II. The bishops stated that many private individuals, as well as religious communities, were seeking the return of property. They cited an estimate from a study conducted by the University of Sarajevo that only 7 percent of restitution claims were of property belonging to religious communities. Cardinal Puljic, the Archbishop of Vrhbosna, added that there were many "dirty acts" surrounding the return of property.

In December, the Islamic Community protested the city administration of Tuzla's issuance of a construction permit for business facilities on land the Islamic Community stated was endowed to it by Muslim believers.

In February, Jakob Finci, the president of the country's Jewish Community, told media that BiH was the only country in the region that had done nothing to resolve the restitution problem and that restitution would not be a financial burden for the country. He said the lack of resolution posed a burden on religious communities, as disputed properties could be an important and much needed source of revenue for them. According to Finci, "We don't need [to be paid] a single mark to carry out restitution. For example, La Benevolencija has a building where the cantonal Ministry of Interior is currently located ... We only want our ownership to be recognized, instead of the state receiving rental income for our property."

In January, SOC Metropolitan Hrizostom stated that political disagreement regarding whether the state or the country's two entities – the Federation and RS – had competency over restitution, as well as the potential cost, continued to be the main barriers to adoption of a law on restitution. In February, members of the BiH Presidency said they would task the MOJ with preparing a report on the status and legal considerations of religious property restitution. By year's end, the ministry had not issued a report on the issue. All major religious groups in the country continued to say there was an urgent need for a restitution law. They said the Federation and the RS restituted religious properties unequally, discriminating against religious minorities in their respective areas.

In February, according to press reports, the Zenica city council voted unanimously to return use of the city's synagogue to the Jewish Community. Zenica Mayor Fuad Kasumovic stated that, because of the absence of a restitution law, the city would continue to own the property.

The municipality of Stari Grad Sarajevo continued construction of a large building in the center of Sarajevo on a plot of land previously claimed by four Jewish families and the Islamic Community. The BiH Jewish Community reported that the last living member of the Jewish Community with claims to the property was compensated 110,000 convertible marks (BAM) (\$63,800) in September, thus ending the dispute with them. The Islamic Community was reportedly compensated for its share of the property in 2019.

Online news site *Balkan Insight* reported in March that Banja Luka prosecutors said in February that they had ended investigations in five cases involving the destruction of five mosques in Banja Luka and Gradiska in 1993 because the statute of limitations had expired. The Islamic Community stated prosecutors had rejected its request to pursue the cases as war crimes, investigating them instead under a law against demolition of cultural and historical monuments, the most lenient law available in terms of penalties and the statute of limitations. The Islamic Community had, according to *Balkan Insight*, taken its case to the state prosecutor's office and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, requesting that the BiH Prosecutor's Office take over the cases and that they be treated as war crimes. At year's end the BiH Prosecutor's Office had not taken over the cases.

The parish priest of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Novi Grad, Banja Luka Diocese, reported that on November 11, a private local construction company paved an asphalt road directly in front of the church's entrance, even though the paved land belonged to the church, which had not granted permission for the paving. He requested action from the local mayor, but authorities had not acted by year's end.

The 2021 European Commission report on BiH stated authorities failed to meet court ruling requirements to complete or apply the common core curriculum or make progress in eliminating the practice of "two schools under one roof," where children in the same school were segregated based on ethnicity. The report also said even online education was implemented via separate platforms, many RS schools did not recognize the Bosnian language, and the availability of teaching in the national groups of subjects remained limited. According to the OSCE and reports by various media outlets, returnee students (those belonging to a minority ethnic group returning to their homes after being displaced by the war in the 1990's) continued to face barriers in exercising their rights to education in their own language. The OSCE and media reported that parents of Bosniak children in returnee communities throughout the RS continued to boycott public schools in favor of sending their children to alternative schooling financed and organized by the Federation Ministry of Education with support from the governments of the Sarajevo and the Zenica-Doboj Cantons and the Islamic Community. According to the OSCE, the RS Ministry of Education and Culture (RS MoEC) again failed to approve a group of "national" subjects (specific courses to which Bosniak, Serb, and Croat students were legally entitled and that were to be taught in their constituent language according to their ethnicity). The RS MoEC also again failed to comply with an RS Supreme Court ruling from December 2019 that students in a school in Vrbanjci, Kotor Varos receive instruction in the national group of subjects and in the Bosnian language.

According to nongovernmental organizations and media reports, parents of different faiths throughout the country continued to send their children to public school religious education classes to avoid having their children stand out from other children who attended the classes and be exposed to peer pressure.

The government again failed to comply with a 2009 ruling by the ECHR stating the country should amend its constitution to allow members of minority groups, including Jews, to run for the Presidency, the House of Peoples, and other offices reserved for members of constituent peoples. BiH political leaders were engaged in negotiations during the year on an electoral and limited constitutional reform package that according to international experts would have included implementation of the court's decision. At year's end, however, political leaders had not reached an agreement. On December 22, the 12th anniversary of the ruling, Dervo Sejdic, one of the appellants, said he felt very sad the discriminatory provision in the BiH constitution had not been eliminated.

According to Bosniak Muslim, Croat Catholic, and Serb Orthodox religious communities, authorities continued to discriminate against them and enforce selectively the rights of religious groups regarding access to education, employment, health care, and other social services in areas where those groups constituted religious minorities. They said refugees returning to their original communities pursuant to the Dayton Peace Agreement were particularly subject to discrimination. In November, RS Vice President Ramiz Salkic, a Muslim, wrote a letter to RS Prime Minister Radovan Viskovic calling on the RS to end employment, education, language, and religious holiday discrimination against the predominantly Muslim Bosniak minority returnees in the RS. In his letter, Salkic stated the RS education system incorporated discriminatory elements, including naming schools after Serbian historic figures or Serbian Orthodox saints, celebrating the day of St. Sava, the Orthodox patron saint of schools, harmonizing curricula with Serbia instead of other parts of BiH, and glorifying convicted war criminals in history textbooks.

Religious leaders also continued to state that police were reluctant to investigate potential hate crimes targeting religious minority communities because law enforcement officials often represented and included only the members of the majority group.

On September 15, the RS National Assembly adopted a law mandating use of the Cyrillic alphabet and Serb language for all institutions that receive funding from the RS budget and at all government-funded events. The Bosniak and Croat caucuses of the RS Council of Peoples opposed the law and

blocked its implementation, pending a judicial review. On November 23, the RS Constitutional Court ruled that the law violated the vital national interests of Bosniaks and Croats and was invalid. As a result, the law did not enter into force.

According to the OSCE, in 2020, the most recent year for which data were available, BiH judicial institutions completed five court cases concerning potential religious bias incidents. Three cases were treated as felonies and two as misdemeanors. In the first felony case, the Municipal Court in Kiseljak acquitted a suspect charged with causing public danger by arson due to lack of evidence. Prosecutors charged the defendant with setting on fire a local imam's car parked inside a garage next to the imam's home in 2017. In the second felony case, the Court of BiH sentenced an individual charged with incitement to hatred to one year in prison with mandatory psychiatric treatment as a result of a plea agreement with the BiH Prosecutor's Office. The defendant targeted a local imam in Gacko with a series of online death threats and profanities based on religion and ethnicity. He also defecated in front of the entrance of the local mosque. In the third felony case, the Court of BiH sentenced an individual to six months of imprisonment suspended for two years for endangering personal security with online threats.

In one of the misdemeanor cases, the Municipal Court in Bosanska Krupa imposed a fine of BAM 500 (\$290) on an individual it convicted of violating public peace and order by posting a video of himself in 2020, verbally insulting the SOC and its flag, calling the latter the flag of Republika Srpska, which he said was a "genocidal creation." In the other, the Municipal Court in Bihac imposed a fine of BAM 300 (\$170) on the parents of a minor girl who sprayed graffiti insulting God and Jesus on the walls of a Catholic Church. The court convicted them of failure to exercise parental supervision of a minor.

On several occasions, leaders of the IRC – whose membership comprises the four traditional religious communities – again said local authorities throughout the country continued to discriminate in providing police protection and investigating threats of violence, harassment, and vandalism. While only a few cases were recorded, the IRC said law enforcement officials treated the cases as simple theft or vandalism, without taking into consideration that the acts occurred at religious sites and could be categorized as hate crimes. According to the IRC, the officials rarely investigated the motives of the acts, which would help distinguish cases of simple theft from hate crimes. In many instances, IRC leaders said they hesitated to report incidents to the police or media, particularly in areas where their religious group was a minority, fearing that public attention could result in retaliation or raise tensions in the community, with deleterious effects on IRC members.

On January 11, the House of Representatives (lower chamber) of the BiH parliament adopted a nonbinding resolution sponsored by parliamentarian Damir Arnaut of Nasa Stranka (Our Party) to rename streets, squares, parks, schools, and other places that honored World War II Nazi collaborators with the names of persons from the country recognized by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center. The resolution was nonbinding, as local municipalities, not parliament, would have the authority to implement it. Shortly after the resolution passed, the Bosniak-majority Stranka Demokratske Akcije (Party of Democratic Action, or SDA) party, which had voted for it, reversed its position and criticized the initiative for including Bosniaks among the list of Nazi collaborators. SDA leader Bakir Izetbegovic stated that the choices made by Bosniak Nazi collaborators Husein Dozo, Mustafa Busuladzic, and Hafiz Muhamed Pandza should be evaluated in their "global and historical context." SDA-aligned press labeled Arnaut a traitor and defended Bosniaks who worked with the Nazis. The BiH House of Peoples (upper chamber) had not acted on the resolution by year's end.

The Federation and RS governments again failed to fulfill their financial commitments to support the IRC. The commitments stemmed from memorandums of cooperation that the state level government of BiH, as well as the governments of the Federation and RS entities and Brcko District, concluded with the IRC in 2011. The memorandums stipulated annual contributions to the IRC budget of BAM 100,000 (\$58,000) by the state, BAM 50,000 (\$29,000) by the entities, and BAM 20,000 (\$11,600) from Brcko District. In practice, however, neither the Federation nor the RS governments honored their financial commitment over the previous eight years. The BiH Council of Ministers and Brcko District continued to provide the annual grant regularly to the IRC from their respective budgets.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The IRC, which records and tracks cases of religious intolerance and hatred, recorded three incidents against religious officials and 23 cases of vandalism against religious buildings. Of the 23 incidents of vandalism, eight targeted Catholics, 10 Muslims, three the SOC, and two the Jewish Community. In 2020, the IRC recorded 17 incidents of vandalism against religious buildings, identifying suspects in only three of those cases. Because religion and ethnicity often are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many actions as solely based on religious identity.

The IRC again stated it believed the actual number of religiously motivated incidents against religious persons or buildings was much higher but that members of religious groups feared reporting them. The IRC also stated it lacked the staff, capacity, or funding to follow up in detail on every case.

In one of the three incidents against persons, on January 18, a man in Livno Canton verbally insulted imams and Muslims gathered in a mosque. Livno Canton Police identified the individual and arrested him. Authorities fined him for disturbing public peace and order.

The BiH Jewish Community reported a significant increase in antisemitic speech online, especially after clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in May. Examples of online hate speech included targeting members of the Jewish Community, sending them death threats, denying the Holocaust, glorifying Hitler, and stating that “all Jews should be sent to Auschwitz gas chambers.” The IRC condemned this social media post and called on local police to investigate the case and identify the author of the post.

On February 18, an unknown person fired several gunshots at the minaret of the historic Aladza Mosque in Foca, causing minor damage. Police investigated but had not identified a suspect by year’s end.

In March, a person drew a swastika on an obituary that was hanging on the entrance of the Ashkenazi Synagogue/Jewish Community headquarters in the center of Sarajevo. The obituary was of a prominent member of the Jewish Community in Sarajevo. Using surveillance camera footage, Sarajevo Canton Police identified the 17-year-old who drew the swastika and filed a criminal report against him with the Sarajevo Canton Prosecutor’s Office.

On May 9, an unknown person drew graffiti insulting Jesus on the front of the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Bihac. Near the church, there was a swastika drawn on a traffic sign, and the slogan “Knife, Wire, Srebrenica,” referencing the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, written on a billboard nearby. Bihac Mayor Suhret Fazlic condemned the vandalism and called on police to investigate it vigorously, but there were no developments in the case by year’s end. The Islamic Community also condemned the incident, saying via social media that desecration of religious objects was an act not only against religion but also against civilization, and that should concern everyone.

On August 5, unidentified persons broke a window in the Orthodox Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin in the village of Vukovsko near Kupres and overturned the headstone of the grave of Simo Popovic, the priest who built the church in 1860. The attack was the third on the church in recent years. MHRR Minister Milos Lucic condemned the incident. There were no developments in the case by year’s end.

Mesud Hrbat, a Sarajevo businessman, provided support to all four main religious groups in Sarajevo in order, he said, to contribute to good neighborly and interreligious relations in Sarajevo. Hrbat funded the construction of a mosque in the Rjecica settlement of Sarajevo’s Novi Grad Municipality, paid BAM 100,000 (\$58,000) for the facade of the Catholic Saint Luke the Evangelist Church in Sarajevo’s Municipality of Novi Grad and BAM 100,000 (\$58,000) for restoration of the yard of the Old Orthodox Church in Sarajevo, and pledged BAM 60,000 (\$34,800) for a new facade on the Ashkenazi Synagogue /Jewish community building in Sarajevo.

In 2020 (the most recent year for which data were available), the OSCE Mission to BiH observed through its monitoring program 16 potential bias-motivated incidents targeting Muslims and 27 incidents targeting Christians (Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Orthodox). All 43 incidents, which represented a 39 percent increase over the 31 the OSCE reported in 2019, were reported to the police. The incidents included threatening religious officials such as Cardinal Puljic, threatening believers, disturbing religious ceremonies, vandalism of religious properties, desecration of cemeteries, and other property offenses. The OSCE said the data should be interpreted with caution because of an assumed high rate of underrecording and underreporting of bias crimes in the country.

The Council of Muftis of the Islamic Community said it was continuing efforts to persuade unregistered Islamic congregations (known as *para-jamaats*), which gathered predominantly Salafist followers and operated outside the purview of the Islamic Community, to cease what they described as “unsanctioned” religious practices and officially unite with the Islamic Community. The Islamic Community reported there were 20 active para-jamaats, compared with 11 in 2020. According to Islamic Community officials, the difference was not the result of an increase in the number of para-jamaats but of better data collection. According to the Islamic Community, of these 20 groups, four had memberships consisting of up to 40 families, while other para-jamaats comprised only a handful of believers.

The IRC continued working on different projects through its 15 local chapters across the country, primarily focusing on youth and women. The projects included publishing a manual to guide religious officials working with wartime sexual abuse survivors and organizing an interreligious camp

that brought together youth from all principal religious communities across the country. The IRC also continued to monitor and condemn attacks on religious leaders and buildings. In September, the IRC organized a youth conference on combating hate speech, including religiously motivated hate speech, in social media. The IRC also expanded its interfaith network of women belonging to different religious groups across its 15 chapters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In meetings with government officials, U.S. embassy representatives emphasized the need to promote respect for religious diversity and enforce equal treatment for religious minorities. In February, the Ambassador met with the BiH Presidency and urged them to support the adoption of restitution legislation. Embassy officials continued to stress with BiH government officials, and with the MHRR, the importance of concluding the agreement with the Islamic Community, implementing the agreements with the SOC and Catholic Church, and taking steps to implement the law on religious freedom.

In June, the Ambassador and OSCE Ambassador met with a group of Herzegovina religious leaders, including Bishop of Mostar Duvno Diocese Palic, Mostar Mufti Salem Dedovic, and Orthodox Bishop Dimitrije, to discuss interreligious dialogue, postwar recovery, and reconciliation. It was the first joint meeting of the leaders of the three religious communities in Herzegovina since the war.

On October 16, the Ambassador attended a reception in Sarajevo hosted by the SOC in honor of Serbian Patriarch Porfirije's visit. In his engagement with the Patriarch, the Ambassador stressed the importance of interreligious dialogue and religious communities' role in promoting reconciliation.

On November 16, the Counselor of the Department of State met with BiH religious leaders from the Islamic Community, Catholic Church, and Jewish Community. The Counselor discussed with them their perspective on the political crisis in BiH and encouraged them to work together and take a more active role on reconciliation and peacebuilding.

On September 28, the Ambassador and a senior embassy official met with the newly appointed Mufti of Sarajevo, Nedžad Grabus, to discuss the Islamic Community's views of the political crisis in BiH, the importance of interreligious dialogue, and the religious community's role in promoting mutual understanding.

Throughout the year, embassy officials continued to hold small in-person meetings and host events with the representatives of the Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. At these events, embassy officials emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue and respect for religious diversity and urged the religious communities to continue efforts to foster reconciliation, counter violent extremism related to religion, and condemn intolerance and hate speech.

The embassy reinforced the messages it conveyed at these events and meetings on its social media platforms; the postings, particularly on Twitter, included calls for tolerance and the importance of interreligious dialogue and reconciliation. For example, following the Counselor's meeting with BiH religious leaders, the embassy shared his statement recognizing the role of religious communities in promoting reconciliation. The embassy also welcomed an IRC statement that called on local political leaders to deescalate the political crisis and return to citizen-focused reforms.

A total of 80 students from four madrassahs – high schools run by the Islamic Community – throughout the country participated in and successfully completed an embassy-funded two-year intensive Access English language program. The program brought together students of different backgrounds from underserved communities into one mixed, American-style classroom. In all participating high schools, Access teachers used an interactive approach to language learning and challenged students to promote peace, cooperation, and tolerance in their communities.

The embassy continued supporting the Interreligious Studies and Peacebuilding master's program, a long term project in its fifth year of operation, implemented jointly by the Catholic Theological Faculty, Faculty of Islamic Studies (both of the University of Sarajevo), and the Orthodox Theological Faculty (University of East Sarajevo) and accredited by both schools. During the 2020-2021 academic year, in which there were 12 students enrolled, the embassy financed a Fulbright fellow who was one of the professors teaching the program. The program's stated goal was to bring together professionals and students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to highlight the role of religious institutions as advocates of a more just and peaceful society.

The embassy also provided a grant to the IRC to organize an eight-day interreligious youth camp called "Meet-Pray-Cooperate" in October, which gathered 50 youths from different religious groups from around the country. The camp included lectures, workshops, sports, and cultural activities.

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