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2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Poland

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion. It states religion is a personal choice, and all churches and religious organizations have equal rights. A concordat with the Holy See defines relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Statutes and agreements determine relations between the government and 15 religious groups. The law prohibits public speech offensive to religious sentiment. The government decided 151 religious communal-property restitution cases out of 3,089 outstanding cases. The president, prime minister, and interior minister denounced anti-Semitism. Senior government officials participated in Holocaust remembrance events. During the year, the government and various political parties rejected calls for broad, expedited private property restitution. Jewish groups criticized as insensitive some statements by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and other public figures about property restitution. Ruling party leaders also made statements during the year that were criticized as insensitive by Jewish groups and other observers. Some opposition parliamentarians made anti-Semitic comments during the year.

The government investigated 429 incidents in 2018 (the most recent data available) in which the motivation of the perpetrator was the religious affiliation of the victim, compared with 506 in the previous year. The 2018 data did not specify which religious groups were targeted in these incidents. Civil society groups said the figures were not comprehensive. News media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and Jewish groups reported the level of anti-Semitic speech remained relatively high, especially in online messaging and internet media websites, after an increase in 2018. There were incidents of physical attacks against Roman Catholic clergy and vandalism at Jewish and Roman Catholic sites. Most Poles believed religious discrimination in Poland was rare, although a significant portion of the population believed anti-Semitism was a problem, according to opinion polls.

The U.S. Ambassador, other embassy staff, and visiting U.S. officials discussed with government officials the status of property restitution and countering anti-Semitism. In February the Secretary of State publicly urged the government to move forward with comprehensive private property restitution legislation for those who lost property during the Holocaust. In May and September, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism engaged with government officials and Jewish community leaders on efforts to combat anti-Semitism. The Ambassador and other embassy staff also met a

wide variety of groups, including Jewish groups, to discuss restitution and other issues, such as anti-Semitism and Holocaust remembrance and education. The Ambassador co- led the first official U.S. government delegation to the March of the Living event at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The embassy and the consulate general in Krakow engaged with Jewish and Muslim leaders on countering anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and sponsored exchanges, roundtables, cultural events, and education grants promoting interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38.4 million (midyear 2019 estimate). The 2019 Polish government statistical yearbook, which publishes the membership figures for religious groups that voluntarily submit the information for publication, reports 86 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic. The next largest religious groups are the Polish Orthodox Church, with approximately half a million members (religious groups report that the number of Orthodox worshippers doubled since 2014, given an influx of migrant Ukrainian workers), and Jehovah's Witnesses, with approximately 117,000 members. Other religious groups include Lutheran, Pentecostal, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the Polish National Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist, Church of Christ, Methodist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Buddhist. Some Jewish groups estimate there are 20,000 Jews, while other estimates put the number as high as 40,000. Muslim groups estimate there are 25,000 Muslims, mostly Sunni. Approximately 10 percent of Muslims are ethnic Tatars, a group present in the country for several hundred years.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion. It states freedom of religion includes the freedom to profess or to accept a religion by personal choice as well as to manifest that religion, either individually or collectively, publicly or privately, by worshipping, praying, participating in ceremonies, performing rites, or teaching. It states freedom to express religion may be limited only by law when necessary to defend state security, public order, health, morals, or the rights of others. The constitution states, “Churches and other religious organizations shall have equal rights.” It stipulates the relationship between the state and churches and other religious organizations shall be based on the principle of respect for autonomy and mutual independence. The constitution specifies that relations with the Roman Catholic Church shall be determined by an international concordat concluded with the Holy See and by statute, and relations with other churches and religious organizations by statutes adopted pursuant to agreements between representatives of these groups and the Council of Ministers.

According to the constitution, freedom of religion also includes the right to own places of worship and to provide religious services. The constitution stipulates parents have the right to ensure their children receive a moral and religious upbringing and teaching in accordance with their convictions and their own religious and philosophical beliefs. It states religious organizations may teach their faith in schools if doing so does not infringe on the religious freedom of others. The constitution acknowledges the right of national and ethnic minorities to establish institutions designed to protect religious identity. The constitution prohibits parties and other organizations with programs based on Nazism or communism.

The criminal code outlaws public speech that offends religious sentiment. The law prescribes a fine, typically 5,000 zloty (\$1,300), or up to two years in prison for violations.

By law, anyone who publicly assigns the “Polish state or nation” responsibility or joint responsibility for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich during World War II (WWII) may be sued by the Institute of National Remembrance and relevant NGOs, fined, and/or forced to retract the offending statement and pay compensation to the state or a charity.

Specific legislation governs the relationship of 15 religious groups with the state, outlining the structure of that relationship and procedures for communal property restitution. The 15 religious groups are the Roman Catholic Church, Polish Orthodox Church, Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) Church, Evangelical Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Polish National Catholic Church, Pentecostal Church, the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, Mariavite Church, Old Catholic Mariavite Church, Old Eastern Orthodox Church, Muslim Religious Union, and Karaim Religious Union. Marriages performed by officials from 11 of these groups do not require further registration at a civil registry office; however, the Mariavite Church, Muslim Religious Union, Karaim Religious Union, and Old Eastern Orthodox Church do not have that right. An additional 166 registered religious groups and five aggregate religious organizations (the Polish Ecumenical Council, Polish Buddhist Union, Biblical Society, Evangelical Alliance, and Council of Protestant Churches) do not have a statutorily defined relationship with the state.

The law on freedom of conscience and religion states that relations between the state and all churches and other religious unions are based on the respect of freedom of conscience and religion. This includes separation of churches and other religious unions from the state; freedom to perform religious functions; equality of all churches and religious unions, no matter how their legal situation is regulated; and legal protections for churches and other religious groups within the scope defined by the law. In accordance with the law, the government and the Roman Catholic Church participate in the Joint Government-Episcopate Committee, co-chaired by the Minister of Interior and Administration and a bishop, currently the Archbishop of Gdansk, which meets regularly to discuss Catholic Church-state relations. The government also participates in a joint government-Polish Ecumenical Council committee, co-chaired by a Ministry of Interior and Administration (MIA) undersecretary and the head of the Polish Ecumenical Council

(an association composed of seven denominations and two religious associations, all of them non-Roman Catholic Christian), which meets to discuss issues related to minority Christian churches operating in the country.

Religious groups not the subject of specific legislation may register with the MIA, but registration is not obligatory. To register, the law requires a group to submit a notarized application with the personal information of at least 100 citizen members; details about the group's activities in the country; background on its doctrine and practices; a charter and physical address; identifying information about its leaders; a description of the role of the clergy, if applicable; and information on funding sources and methods of new member recruitment. If the ministry rejects the registration application, religious groups may appeal to an administrative court. By law, the permissible grounds for refusal of an application are failure to meet formal requirements or inclusion in the application of provisions that may violate public safety and order, health, public morality, parental authority or freedom, and rights of other persons. Unregistered groups may worship, proselytize, publish or import religious literature freely, and bring in foreign missionaries, but they have no legal recognition and are unable to undertake certain functions such as owning property or holding bank accounts in their name. The 186 registered and statutorily recognized religious groups receive other privileges not available to unregistered groups, such as selective tax benefits – they are exempt from import tariffs, property taxes and income tax on their educational, scientific, cultural, and legal activities, and their official representatives are also exempt from income and property taxes – and the right to acquire property and teach religion in schools.

Four commissions oversee communal religious-property restitution claims submitted by their respective statutory filing deadlines: one each for the Jewish community, Lutheran Church, and Orthodox Church, and one for all other denominations. The commissions function in accordance with legislation providing for the restitution to religious communities of property they owned that was nationalized during or after WWII. A separate commission overseeing claims by the Roman Catholic Church completed its work in 2011. The MIA and the respective religious community each appoint representatives to the commissions. The law states decisions by the commission ruling on communal property claims may not be appealed, but the Constitutional Tribunal ruled in 2013 that parties could appeal commission decisions in administrative courts. There have been no reports of parties filing such appeals. The law does not address communal properties the government sold or turned over to new private owners after WWII.

There is no comprehensive national law governing private property restitution. Members of religious groups, like other private claimants, may pursue restitution through the courts.

The law authorizes Warsaw city authorities to resolve expeditiously longstanding restitution cases affecting Warsaw properties being used for public purposes. Warsaw city officials must post a notification of specific public properties for a six-month period during which original owners of the property must submit their claims. At the end of the six-month period, Warsaw city authorities may make a final determination on the

disposition of the property, either declaring that the property shall remain public and not be subject to any future claims, or returning the property or monetary compensation to the original owner.

In accordance with the law, all public and private schools teach voluntary religion classes. Schools at all grade levels must provide instruction in any of the registered faiths if there are at least seven students requesting it. Each registered religious group determines the content of classes in its faith and provides the teachers, who receive salaries from the state. Students may also request to take an optional ethics class instead of a religion class; the ethics class is optional even if students decline to take a religion class.

Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom, and the law prohibits discrimination or persecution based on religion or belief.

The constitution recognizes the right to conscientious objection to military service on religious grounds but states such objectors may be required to perform alternative service as specified by law.

The human rights ombudsman is responsible for safeguarding human and civil freedoms and rights, including the freedom of religion and conscience, specified in the constitution and other legal acts. The ombudsman is independent from the government and appointed by parliament.

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

Government Practices

According to MIA statistics, the religious community property commissions resolved 151 communal property claims during the year, out of approximately 3,089 pending claims by religious groups, compared with 87 claims resolved the previous year. At year's end, the commissions had partially or entirely resolved a total of 2,852 of 5,504 claims by the Jewish community deemed valid by the commission (40 were previously dismissed by the commission as invalid), 981 of 1,182 claims by the Lutheran community, 365 of 472 claims by the Orthodox Church, and 89 of 170 claims by all other denominations.

Critics continued to point out the laws on religious communal property restitution do not address the issue of disputed communal properties now privately owned, and the government left several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. These included cases in which buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after WWII. The Jewish community continued to report the pace of Jewish communal property restitution was slow, involved considerable legal expense, and often ended without any recovery of property or other compensation for claimants. For example, the process of returning the old Jewish cemetery in the city of Kalisz started 19 years ago, and it remained unresolved at year's end.

During the year, Warsaw city authorities continued implementing a 2015 law intended to end abusive practices in the trading of former property owners' claims. Legal experts expressed concern the law limited the ability of claimants to reclaim property unjustly taken from their lawful owners during the WWII and communist eras, including from Jews and members of other religious minorities. On May 10, Warsaw city authorities stated that since the 2015 law entered into force, the city had resolved approximately 100 dormant claims filed before 1950, which included the refusal of 82 restitution claims against public properties. These included schools, preschools, a park, a police command unit site, a hospital, and city-owned apartment houses. There was no information available as to the identity of those claiming prior ownership or how many of them belonged to religious minorities.

A special government commission continued to investigate accusations of irregularities in the restitution of private property in Warsaw. On June 3, the commission reported it had reviewed 806 prior restitution cases and issued 97 decisions since 2016. The commission chair also estimated the commission issued decisions regarding the payment of compensation worth 4.2 million zloty (\$1.11 million). Several NGOs and lawyers representing claimants, including lawyers representing Holocaust survivors or their heirs, stated the commission had a negative effect on private property restitution cases, as administrative and court decisions had slowed down in response to the commission's decisions.

During the year, the government and various political parties rejected calls for broad, expedited private property restitution. At a party convention on May 17, Prime Minister (PM) Morawiecki stated Poland should not be saddled with financial obligations in providing restitution payments, saying that such a move would defy basic principles of international law and would be “Hitler’s posthumous victory.” Law and Justice Party (PiS) chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski stated on June 4 that as long as PiS was in power, the party was “a guarantee that Poland will not pay for German crimes of World War II. If Jews have any claims, let them turn to Germany. Poles owe them absolutely nothing.” Responding to a question about Holocaust-era property restitution, PM Morawiecki said on September 26, “Demanding any compensation from Poland is not only inappropriate but is also an insult to basic historical truth.” On May 15, Robert Winnicki, a member of the lower house of parliament (Sejm) and the far-right Confederation Party, said PiS, the majority party in the Sejm, “want[s] to sell Poland to the Jews” after the Sejm declined to review a bill that would ban heirless property restitution. Stanislaw Tyszka, then a deputy speaker of the Sejm with the Kukiz’15 Party, said on May 15 that PiS’s refusal to take up the legislation “shows that the Polish government is no longer on its knees, but is lying flat in front of [the United States] and Israel.”

In August PiS expelled Senator Waldemar Bonkowski, who was suspended from the party in 2018 for posting anti-Semitic material on his Facebook page, including a video edited from Nazi propaganda movies. Media reported that he was expelled partly because of his anti-Semitic comments.

In May, then European Parliament (EP) candidate and current parliamentarian for the Confederation Party Grzegorz Braun said in a press conference, “The American empire is here the political, and also military, tool of Jewish blackmail against Poland.” The same month, Braun said in a far-right magazine that Jews “have waged war for centuries” against Poles and “the whole Christian world.”

In August Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich addressed an open letter to Veterans Affairs Minister Jan Kasprzyk criticizing the government’s decision to honor WWII ultra-nationalist fighters of the Holy Cross Mountains Brigade, which killed Poles it suspected of being communist, including many Jews. Schudrich called his invitation to the event a “personal insult.” “There are so many other Polish heroes, we don’t need to choose the ones who actually killed other Poles, and in this case, many of them of the Jewish religion,” Schudrich said, dubbing the ceremony “dangerous” historical revisionism.

In February Sejm member Pawel Kukiz (then from the Kukiz’15 party, afterward from the Polish Coalition) posted tweets listing persons of Jewish origin whom he alleged worked for the communist regime after the war and were responsible for death sentences against Polish soldiers. His tweets were in response to comments from then acting Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who in the same month said many Poles had collaborated with the Nazis, and Poles “suckle anti-Semitism with their mothers’ milk.” In his tweets, Kukiz said, “Since Minister Katz talks about Poles involved in the murder of Jews (and unfortunately they were), I allow myself to remind [others] about the Jews who murdered Poles in the service of the Soviets.” After facing public criticism, Kukiz announced he would take legal action against anyone who called him an anti-Semite.

During a May 18 televised debate in Kielce, Confederation Party candidate for the EP Konrad Berkowicz placed a kippah over the head of Anna Krupka, a PiS candidate for the EP elections that month. Berkowicz said “[PiS] bow[s] down to Jews,” who would “sell this country for money.” The country’s then-ambassador to Israel condemned the incident, stating that all expressions of “racially motivated” hatred were unacceptable. Berkowicz was elected to the Sejm on October 13.

On January 17, Deputy Prosecutor General Krzysztof Sierak announced 105 prosecutors around the country had been selected to work exclusively on hate crime and hate speech cases. He made assurances that they would not be assigned any other cases and said that all hate speech and hate crime cases would be supervised by district and regional prosecutors’ offices and by the National Prosecutor’s Department of Investigations.

Crucifixes continued to be displayed in both the upper and lower houses of parliament, as well as in many other public buildings, including public school classrooms.

In March media reported that a newsstand in the Sejm offered a right-wing newspaper that advised readers on “How to identify a Jew” and “How to defeat them.” On March 13, the Sejm press office said the newsstand was run by an outside contractor who was responsible for the newspaper selection, and that parliament would request the

periodical be withdrawn. The contractor said it was unable to comply with the request due to laws prohibiting restrictions on dissemination of press publications because of their content.

On March 18, police and the Internal Security Agency detained three men and accused them of promoting fascism and inciting hatred. The agency's officers found neo-fascist literature, clothes and labels with neo-fascist symbols, axes, hatchets, and knives in the men's apartments.

On June 26, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that a law used to punish a print shop worker for refusing to produce LGBTI material was unconstitutional. The case was brought by the prosecutor general, who argued that there should be a right to refuse service based on “religion and conscience,” including “the right not to support homosexual content.” The case originated in a 2016 court ruling that fined the print shop employee for refusing to accept a printing order from an LGBTI group, telling the group that he did not want to “contribute to the promotion of the LGBTI movement.” A lower court had found the employee violated the law, which prohibits “refusing service without just cause.”

In January the Constitutional Tribunal struck down a provision of the 2018 Institute of National Remembrance law which criminalized denial that Ukrainian nationalists had committed crimes against Poles between 1925 and 1950 and had collaborated with Nazi Germany. The tribunal ruled that the creators of the provision used vague and imprecise wording when referring to “Ukrainian nationalists” and the location of their crimes, which created uncertainty regarding the applicability of the provision.

On May 6, police arrested a person suspected of creating posters of the icon of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa with her halo painted in the colors of the rainbow flag, which appeared in the city of Plock. The suspect was charged with offending religious sentiment but was released the same day. Then-minister of interior Joachim Brudzinski called the posters “cultural barbarism” and said, “No fairy tales about freedom or tolerance give anyone the right to offend the feelings of the faithful.”

In November the Czestochowa-North District Prosecutor's Office reopened an investigation into the use of an icon of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa with her halo painted in the colors of the rainbow flag during the June 16 Equality March in Czestochowa. The same prosecutor's office had previously discontinued proceedings in October after stating there was no evidence that the march participants had committed the crime of offending religious sentiment.

In November local media reported Tomasz Greniuch, historian and nationalist, was nominated to head the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) office in Opole. Greniuch was the chief of the National-Radical Camp (ONR) in Opole, a group the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination considers fascist and has called upon Poland to ban for promoting “national hatred.” In 2005, Greniuch was an organizer of a march commemorating a 1936 anti-Jewish pogrom in Myslenice.

In January PM Morawiecki and other political and religious leaders joined Holocaust survivors to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and commemorate the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

On May 15, following an attack in Israel against the Polish ambassador, President Andrzej Duda said, “Just as I fight all instances of anti-Semitism, which I regard as something vile and unworthy, I will never accept any anti-Polish act.”

In an October 25 letter to the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Prime Minister Morawiecki declared the country was committed to fighting all forms of anti-Semitism and condemned all acts of violence against members of Jewish communities or attacks on their places of worship. The letter was written in response to the Jewish Agency’s request that the country secure its synagogues and other Jewish institutions following an October 9 attack outside a synagogue in Halle, Germany.

On January 27, responding to a nationalist march in front of Auschwitz, then-Minister of Interior Joachim Brudziński declared on social media he would never tolerate any kind of Nazi or anti-Semitic propaganda. “I said it many times, and I will repeat again, there will never be any approval from my side to any activities promoting Nazism and anti-Semitism,” he wrote on social media.

In March, at the Israeli government’s request, Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz stated that Poland would deny entry to English author and Holocaust denier David Irving, who planned to lead a tour of Nazi death camps in Poland in September. The minister said, “Denial of the Holocaust is not allowed by Polish law; therefore, he will not be welcome here in Poland if he wants to come and present his opinions.”

In November, media reported that the Foundation of Cultural Heritage, which is partially supported by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, completed a mausoleum in the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery for Jews who fought for the nation’s independence. Construction originally started in 1939, but World War II intervened.

In November, a musical on divergent Polish-Jewish narratives of the Holocaust titled “Letter from Warsaw” premiered in Warsaw with financial support from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The musical tells the story of a family of American Jews that rediscovers its Polish-Jewish roots when informed they are the remaining heirs of unclaimed property in Warsaw.

On May 2, Agriculture Minister Krzysztof Ardanowski marched with Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv Yisrael Meir Lau, Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, and U.S. representatives, among others, in the International March of the Living from Birkenau to Auschwitz. The March of the Living is an annual educational program that brings individuals from around the world to study the history of the Holocaust.

In January the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights, after the Supreme Administrative Court in 2018 rejected its final appeal to register as a religious organization.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In May the European Commission (EC) carried out a study in each EU member state on perceptions of discrimination; it published the results in September. According to the findings, 29 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the country, while 64 percent said it was rare; 82 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 89 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, and 84 percent said they would be with an atheist, 81 percent with a Jew, 77 percent with a Buddhist, and 70 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 88 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 76 percent if atheist, 72 percent if Jewish, 66 percent if Buddhist, and 55 percent if Muslim. The study did not break out respondents by religion.

In January the EC published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each EU member state. According to the survey, 41 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in the country, and 18 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who felt that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 43 percent; anti-Semitism on the internet, 40 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 45 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 41 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 41 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 38 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 31 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 37 percent; and anti-Semitism in the media, 36 percent. The study made no effort to break out respondents by religion.

In November the Anti-Defamation League released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country's residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were “probably true” or “probably false.” The proportion agreeing that various statements were “probably true” was: 64 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Poland; 56 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 74 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

The national prosecutor's office reported that during 2018, the most recent period for which data were available, prosecutors investigated 429 religiously motivated incidents, compared with 506 in the previous year. The 2018 data did not specify which religious groups were targeted in these incidents. The NGO Never Again Association and religious groups stated government tracking of religiously motivated incidents was not comprehensive or systematic.

During the year, there were several physical attacks against Roman Catholic clergy and lay people, as well as against a Muslim. There were also cases of desecration of Roman Catholic, Jewish, and other religious sites, such as churches, temples, and cemeteries.

On July 28, three men attacked a priest and a member of church staff in St. John's Basilica in Szczecin. The priest was taken to the hospital. He said the attackers verbally abused him, bit him in the face, and demanded his liturgical vestments. On September 23, the Szczecin District prosecutor's office indicted the three, whose pretrial detention, which began in July, was extended to at least five months. If convicted, they could face up to 10 years in prison for, among other charges, using violence or criminal threats against someone on the grounds of their religious identity. On July 29, the chief of the Conference of Polish Bishops wrote an open letter to the priest expressing deep concern with what he characterized as the growing frequency of acts of hate against believers, including priests, and against religious buildings, sites, and objects of worship.

On June 10, a man stabbed a priest in front of a church in Wroclaw. The priest was walking to the church to lead morning Mass. In November the Wroclaw prosecutor's office indicted the man with attempted murder. According to media reports, a spokesperson for the archdiocese said he believed the suspect's intent was to attack any “man in a cassock.”

On July 26, four persons came to the parish office in Wloclawek to submit the required official documents in order to renounce their faith. When the priest explained that an act of apostasy could only be signed by a parish priest who was not present at that moment, the persons verbally abused the priest, and one man attacked him with a cross and threw him out of his chair.

On August 27, a man wearing a Star of David necklace entered a pub in Lodz city center. The man said the bartender refused to serve him and said the pub's security guard used vulgar anti-Semitic comments and demanded he leave. The man called the police, who confirmed they received a notification about a possible crime of public offense of a person or group based on their national, ethnic, racial, or religious origin. The president of the pub's board apologized for the incident and said the pub would take immediate steps to prevent similar incidents in the future.

In September media reported on the case of a judge – a member of the National Council of the Judiciary – who in 2015 allegedly used an anonymous online account to make anti-Semitic comments, including calling Jews “a vile, rotten people [who] do not deserve anything.” On September 16, the National Public Prosecutor's Office announced it had launched an investigation into the case.

On May 4, the Oswiecim regional court sentenced far-right activist Piotr Rybak to one year of community service for incitement to hatred on national grounds after he led a January 27 protest of approximately 200 nationalists in front of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi concentration and extermination camp. During the demonstration, he said International Holocaust Remembrance Day glorified Jewish victims and discounted the deaths of Poles, adding, “It's time to fight against Jewry and free Poland from them.” Rybak was jailed previously for burning an effigy of a Jew in 2015.

On November 11, former Roman Catholic priest and far-right activist Jacek Miedlar led a “March of Poles” in Wrocław to celebrate the country’s independence day. City officials decided to terminate the march after some participants, including Miedlar, shouted anti-Semitic slogans. On December 13, the Internal Security Agency arrested Miedlar on charges of public incitement of hatred against Jews. The spokesman for the national security services said on Twitter that Miedlar had been arrested in connection with his manifesto, which accuses Jews of betraying the country when it regained independence in 1918. Miedlar was released the same day. He had previously made anti-Semitic comments and engaged in anti-Semitic activities, including organizing a nationalist march with Piotr Rybak in Wrocław in 2018.

On April 19, residents of the town of Pruchnik enacted an annual ritual that involved hanging, burning, and beating an effigy of Judas Iscariot, who was dressed to look like an Orthodox Jew. On April 22, the Catholic Church condemned the ritual, and then-minister of interior Brudziński called it “idiotic, pseudo-religious chutzpah.” On May 14, the Przemyśl prosecutor’s office said it would not open an investigation into the incident based on incitement to hatred on national grounds, describing the event as a 100-year-old tradition in Pruchnik whose purpose was to condemn the specific behavior of a historical person (Judas) rather than to incite general hatred against Jews.

On November 11, a coalition of groups, including the ONR and All Polish Youth, both of whose ideologies are considered extremist and nationalist by human rights groups, led an annual Independence Day March. March organizer Robert Bakiewicz said in a speech preceding the march, “Jews want to plunder our homeland.” There were no reports of violence, but participants chanted slogans such as “Great Catholic Poland,” and a small number displayed a white supremacist version of the Celtic cross.

On May 11, a nationalist-organized protest against Holocaust-era property restitution and the U.S. Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act took place outside the prime minister’s chancellery and the U.S. embassy in Warsaw. Several thousand people participated. The protest was peaceful and lasted several hours, with marchers chanting “No to Restitution” and “Stop [the] JUST Act.” Leaders of far-right organizations, including ONR and All-Polish Youth, spoke to the crowd. They criticized the governing PiS Party for allegedly bowing to foreign interests at the expense of the nation and vowed that the government would not pay “a single penny” in restitution. They said the JUST Act was a problem created by Jewish organizations and called on President Trump to abolish it. Marchers also chanted “This is Poland, not Polin” (the Hebrew name for Poland) several times in front of the Prime Minister’s Office, with some participants wearing T-shirts with the same message.

On April 19, the U.S. Ambassador’s tweet of Passover holiday wishes generated over 1,500 comments, the vast majority of which were negative and anti-Semitic.

Groups such as National Rebirth of Poland and Blood and Honor continued to espouse anti-Semitic views, but according to the Never Again Association, they were not as active as in previous years.

On October 1, unknown perpetrators painted vulgar anti-Semitic slogans and a swastika on the walls of the former ghetto in Krakow. City authorities immediately removed the graffiti. Police were looking for perpetrators at year's end.

On September 3, media reported the Lublin prosecutor's office discontinued an investigation into graffiti discovered inside the demolished workshop of a stonemason who was renovating a Holocaust memorial in Wawolnica. The perpetrator had painted the inscription “Jews away” inside the building before running through it with a bulldozer. Because the graffiti was not in a public area, it was not considered “public hate speech,” which is illegal.

On July 21, unknown individuals defaced a recently renovated wall of the Jewish cemetery in Tarnow with an anti-Semitic inscription. Tarnow mayor Roman Ciepiela immediately condemned the incident and said city authorities would cover the expenses of removing the inscription. Police were looking for perpetrators at year's end.

On June 11, unknown individuals threw stones at a Roman Catholic church in Konin. They broke stained glass windows and damaged a monument to a Polish saint in front of the church. On June 18, police detained a man and charged him with destruction of property; he pled guilty. If convicted, he could face three months to five years in prison.

On July 9, unknown individuals placed vulgar pictures and the club logo of a Warsaw soccer team in three chapels belonging to a monastery in the town of Krzeszow. On July 15, media reported police managed to identify two teenagers, a 13-year-old and 15-year-old, who admitted to placing the pictures. They claimed they did not realize “how serious the situation was.” Their case was referred to a family court.

On May 30, unknown individuals destroyed a figure of Jesus Christ in a Roman Catholic church in Plonsk. Police initiated an investigation into the incident.

On August 10, during an on-stage performance, a drag queen participating in an LGBTI “Mr. Gay Poland” gala event in Poznan simulated cutting the throat of an effigy of Krakow Archbishop Marek Jedraszewski, who had criticized what he called “LGBTI ideology” in a sermon. Minister of Interior Mariusz Kaminski said prosecutors would look into the incident and noted such behavior was unacceptable, no matter which religion was under attack.

On June 8, at a side event of Warsaw's Equality Parade, three men, including an LGBTI activist who stated he was a bishop of the Free Reformed Church, dressed as priests and held what many observers considered a mock Roman Catholic Mass. The Polish Bishops' Conference issued a statement protesting the event, and the man was charged with offending religious sentiment.

On May 25, during Gdansk's equality march, a group of participants displayed a banner with an image of a vagina imitating a monstrance. The person who carried the banner was dressed as a priest. The Polish Bishops' Conference issued a statement that said the incident showed a lack of respect for believers and violated the right to freedom of religion. Prosecutors opened an investigation, which was ongoing at year's end.

On August 9, the Rzeszow local prosecutor’s office pressed charges against a man who allegedly attacked a Polish Muslim woman and her three-month-old baby in Rzeszow. The man was charged with making threats and offending the woman on the grounds of religious affiliation. The incident took place when the woman was walking with her baby in a stroller along the river. The man verbally abused her and tried to flip over the stroller. He also made death threats against the woman and shouted “Heil Hitler” and “white power.”

On April 17, the Przemyśl local court sentenced 20 men to 30-40 hours of community service for disrupting a religious procession of Greek Catholic and Orthodox Church believers in 2016. The procession was en route from the local cathedral to the Ukrainian war cemetery in Przemyśl at the time.

On December 24, four men broke into a Sikh temple in Warsaw. At year’s end, police were looking for the perpetrators, who were accused of desecrating the area used for performing religious services and stealing two chairs.

In April following the discovery that some bags sold in the Auchan supermarket chain in Krakow had swastikas on them, an Auchan spokesperson said the bags in question were provided by a third party supplier and that store staff did not immediately notice, since the swastikas were printed on only one out of 10 bags. The chain withdrew the bags from its stores. Separately, the Zabka supermarket chain said it would remove all anti-Semitic publications from its convenience stores after media reported it sold periodicals published by a well-known anti-Semite, which included stories such as “How Adolf Built Israel” and “How Jews Collaborated with Germans [During World War II].”

In February local media reported several Jewish leaders, including the Chief Rabbi of Poland and the executive director of the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, said they felt safe in the country. Media pointed out that although there was practically no anti-Semitic violence in the country, anti-Semitic speech was prevalent, mainly on the internet. Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich observed that people with anti-Semitic views had become more confident and open about their views in the last few years.

According to the Never Again Association, during the year anti-Semitism returned as a topic to the public debate, mainly due to the far right Confederation Party’s vocal opposition to comprehensive private property restitution during EP elections in May and parliamentary elections in October. According to the NGO, anti-Semitic messages appeared in online messaging, as well as on nationalist and far-right YouTube channels and internet media websites. The NGO said that while Jews had not been physically attacked, there were cases of vandalism targeting Jewish monuments and cemeteries.

On January 26, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 19th Annual Day of Islam with the stated purpose of promoting peace among religious groups. The Church hosted an event titled “Christians and Muslims – From Competition to Cooperation” in Białystok, which included discussions, readings from the Bible and Quran, and prayers. The Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims also issued a statement appealing to Catholics to cooperate with “Muslim brothers.”

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews organized joint Catholic and Jewish prayers to encourage tolerance and understanding on the October 27 Simchat Torah Jewish holiday. On November 11, the council organized the first-ever bus pilgrimage to sites important to the Hasidic movement in Judaism called “Following the Routes of Tsaddiks” under the honorary patronage of Roman Catholic Bishop Rafal Markowski, the chairman of the Polish Bishops Committee for Dialogue with Judaism.

On October 26, the John Paul II Center of Thought organized an interreligious prayer for peace in Warsaw, which included Archbishop of Warsaw Kazimierz Nycz, Chief Rabbi Schudrich, and Mufti of the Muslim League Nedat Abu Tabaq, as well as representatives of the Orthodox Church, Polish Ecumenical Council, and Sant’Egidio Roman Catholic organization.

Human Library projects, funded by European Economic Area grants and coordinated by NGOs Diversja Association and Lambda Warsaw, continued in several cities and towns around the country, including Warsaw, Olesnica, Wroclaw, and Lodz. The projects involved a diverse group of volunteers, including representatives of Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and other religious groups, who told their stories to individuals who could “borrow” them like books. The stated intent of the project was to foster greater tolerance in general, including religious tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In February the Vice President joined PM Morawiecki and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a wreath-laying ceremony at a monument to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, during which thousands of Polish Jews perished. The Vice President said in remarks to Prime Minister Netanyahu at the nearby POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, “...It is very humbling for me to be here with you in this very special place on this sacred ground, to hear a prayer sung, to remember the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto. To be able to share this moment with you and with members of the Jewish community here in Poland is deeply meaningful.” The Vice President, with President Duda, also placed candles at a memorial to Holocaust victims at the Birkenau death camp.

In February, during a joint appearance with the foreign minister, the Secretary of State publicly urged the government to move forward with comprehensive private-property restitution legislation for those who lost property during the Holocaust era.

In May the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism met with government officials responsible for combating anti-Semitism and working with the Jewish community. He also gave broadcast and print media interviews in which he stressed the importance of combating anti-Semitic speech and explained the purpose of the 2017 JUST Act, which requires the Department of State to report to Congress on the steps taken by the signatories to the Terezin Declaration to compensate Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazi persecution. In September the Special Envoy again met with government officials to discuss relations with the Jewish community and measures to combat anti-Semitism.

The Ambassador, officers from the embassy and consulate general in Krakow, and visiting U.S. Department of State representatives met with government officials from the interior, foreign affairs, and justice ministries; the president's office; the prime minister's office; parliament; and Warsaw and other city offices to discuss private property restitution, communal property restitution to religious groups, anti-Semitism, and antidiscrimination.

The Ambassador and embassy and consulate general staff also met with members and leaders of the local Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities to discuss issues of concern, including private and communal property restitution and the communities' concerns over rising intolerance, anti-Semitism, and anti-Muslim sentiment.

On March 25, the Ambassador met with Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation representatives to discuss the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 2020. In a tweet about the meeting, the Ambassador noted U.S. government support for the foundation's mission to combat anti-Semitism and protect Holocaust memorial sites.

On April 19, the Ambassador attended a ceremony commemorating the 76th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

On May 2, the first-ever official U.S. delegation to the March of the Living took part in the annual commemorative walk between former Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau. Six U.S. ambassadors – to Poland, Israel, Germany, Spain, the Holy See, and Switzerland – participated, joined by the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. Their participation highlighted the continuing importance of combating anti-Semitism and support for the Jewish community. In her tweet about the event, the Ambassador to Poland noted participation in the March of the Living was a U.S. public statement against anti-Semitism, adding the United States would always combat hatred and work together with others for dialogue and tolerance.

Throughout the year, the Ambassador used social media to call for respect and tolerance for all religions, to underscore religious freedom as a fundamental pillar and value of strong democracy, to condemn violence based on religious beliefs, and to highlight U.S. government support for combating anti-Semitism and protecting places related to the Holocaust.

On June 28, staff from the consulate general in Krakow participated in the Ride for the Living, a 90-kilometer (56-mile) bicycle ride from the gates of the Birkenau death camp to Krakow's Jewish Quarter to commemorate the Holocaust and celebrate the revival of Jewish life in Poland.

The embassy continued to employ exchange programs, student roundtables, and grants for education and cultural events to promote religious freedom and tolerance. Highlights included the “Letter from Warsaw” musical on divergent Polish-Jewish narratives of the Holocaust, the Isaac Bashevis Singer Festival in Warsaw, the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow, an exhibit on Poles who helped save Jews during the Holocaust, and a concert commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The embassy

also supported educational programs such as a hackathon, in which computer programmers and others collaborated intensively over two days to create apps to combat anti-Semitism, and a speaker program featuring a U.S. citizen who spoke to audiences in Krakow and Warsaw about his experiences engaging in dialogue with members of hate groups to encourage them to leave organizations such as the KKK. In addition, the embassy provided support for six teachers to attend a Department of State-funded Holocaust teacher training program in the United States, in cooperation with the POLIN Museum and the U.S.-based Association of Holocaust Organizations.

The consulate general in Krakow provided grant funding for an educational project led by Christian Culture Foundation ZNAK that included workshops for Polish elementary and high school students promoting human rights and constitutional rights, including religious freedom.

In July and August, the consulate general in Krakow funded a series of basic and advanced seminars for 50 teachers organized by Galicja Jewish Museum, whose goal was to educate high school teachers about contemporary Jewish life and culture in the country and to raise awareness of its multicultural and multireligious society. The consulate general also funded the Summer Academy for Anti-Discrimination Education, an intensive one-week course for a select group of 16 high school teachers and NGO activists that focused on teaching about anti-Semitism.

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