

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	207
Land:	Bosnien-Hercegovina
Kilde:	U.S. Department of State
Titel:	"International Religious Freedom Report 2007"
Udgivet:	14. september 2007
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. oktober 2007



Bosnia and Herzegovina

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The State Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the entity Constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS) provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where government officials are of the majority religion; the state-level Law on Religious Freedom also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities. However, local authorities sometimes restricted the right to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where such persons are in the minority.

Government protection of religious freedom declined, especially during the campaign period prior to the October 2006 national elections, due to selective legal enforcement and the indifference of some government officials. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was implementing the State Law on Religious Freedom to protect the rights of religious communities and create a government registry allowing them to establish legal status.

Societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief and practice persisted. Religious intolerance directly reflected ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with religious background. Discrimination against religious minorities occurred in nearly all parts of the country. In some communities local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalism through public statements and sermons. A number of illegally constructed religious objects continued to cause ethnic/religious tension and conflict in various communities. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation. The U.S. Embassy supported religious communities in their efforts to acquire permits for funeral and burial services and the building of new religious structures. The Embassy assisted religious communities' activities regarding restitution of property and also helped small religious groups to obtain legal registration of their churches in BiH.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country's territory is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a separate administrative district in Brcko (Brcko District). The country has an area of 31,816 square miles and a population of 3.9 million.

There were no reliable government statistics available on the membership of different religious groups. According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constitute 40 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent. Bosniaks are generally associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. However, many persons who identify with a major ethnoreligious group are atheists or agnostics who do not regularly practice any religion. The Jewish community has approximately 1,000 believers and maintains a historic place in society by virtue of centuries of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities.

The rate of religious observance is relatively low among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance exist, such as among Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region and among Bosnian Muslims in Central Bosnia. For many Bosnian Muslims, religion often serves as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice is confined to occasional visits to the mosque or significant rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death. Nevertheless, religious leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities claimed that all forms of observance were increasing among young persons as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage, in large part due to the national religious revival that occurred as a result of the 1992-95 Bosnian war. Younger believers who grew up in the post-communist period also have more freedom to practice their religion and more access to religious education. Leaders from the three largest religious communities observed that they enjoyed greater support from their believers in rural areas of Bosnia than from those in urban centers such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992-95 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethnoreligious areas. Increased levels of returns, which peaked in 2002, continued to slow significantly, leaving the majority of Serb Orthodox adherents living in the RS and the majority of Muslims and Catholics in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remain. However, returns of Serb Orthodox adherents and Muslims in recent years to their prewar homes in western Bosnia and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia have shifted the ethnoreligious composition in both areas. For example, the prewar population of the eastern RS town of Bratunac was 64 percent Bosniak. In 1995 the population was almost completely Serb; in 2007, after the return of 6,500 Bosniaks, the population was 38 percent Bosniak. Similarly, in Prijedor Municipality in the RS, approximately half of the prewar Bosniak population of 49,500 returned, partially reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing. The number of Catholics returning to central Bosnia and the RS, as well as of Serbs returning to the Federation, was negligible.

There are eight muftis (Islamic scholars) located in major municipalities: Sarajevo, Bihac, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The more conservative Islamic communities in Bosnia are located in towns such as Travnik, Bocinja/Zavidovici, Tesanj, Maglaj, Bugojno, and Zenica. The Catholic community maintains its Bishops' Conference as an overarching organizational and regional structure, with bishops residing in Mostar, Banja Luka, and Sarajevo; the Franciscan order maintains its strongest presence in central Bosnia near Sarajevo and in Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox Church maintains its greatest influence in the RS, with the most influential bishops residing in Banja Luka, Trebinje, and Bijeljina. The Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia, including Protestants, has its strongest membership in Sarajevo. There are several small Christian denominations throughout the country.

Missionary activity is limited but growing. Some foreign missionaries preached forms of Islam that tend to be intolerant of other religions and other interpretations of Islam.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, respect for religious freedom declined due to selective legal enforcement and indifference of some government officials, which allowed societal violence and the threat of violence to restrict the ability to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where they are in the minority. On October 16, 2006, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees issued instructions for implementation of the Law on Religious Freedom, which provides for freedom of religion, ensures legal status of churches and religious communities, and prohibits any form of discrimination against any religious community. The law also provides the basis for the establishment of relations between the state and religious communities.

The State Constitution safeguards the rights of the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats), and by extension the three largest religious communities, by providing proportional representation for each group in the government and in the armed forces. As a result of the governmental structure created by the Dayton Accords, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples." These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" and sympathizers of certain religious communities that do not fit neatly into the three groups. During the period covered by this report, members of the Bosnian Jewish and the Romani communities filed separate lawsuits before the European Court of Human Rights to address this discrimination against those considered "others" by the State Constitution. Their claims were not addressed during the reporting period.

Bosnia's state-level government does not officially recognize any religious holy days as an official holiday, and Parliament continued to disagree on a state law on national holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognize religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government and public offices closed on those days. In May 2007 the RS Constitutional Court overruled a Vital National Interest veto by Bosniaks in the RS Council of Peoples, thus enabling the RS National Assembly to pass the Law on Holidays in the RS, which includes observance of RS Day on January 9. Locally observed holy days include Orthodox Easter and Christmas in the RS, Catholic Easter and Christmas in Herzegovina, and Kurban Bajram and Ramadan Bajram in Sarajevo and central Bosnia. On January 27, 2007, BiH officially marked Holocaust Day for the first time and commemorated the day with a series of exhibitions, lectures, and discussions throughout the country.

The State Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and it provides for the right to freedom of conscience and religion in Bosnia. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The law also creates a unified register for all religious groups within the Bosnian Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting violations of religious freedom.

According to the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may apply to form a new church or religious community with a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice will issue a decision within 30 days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law allows minority religious organizations to register legally and operate without unwarranted restrictions. At the end of the period covered by this

report, the Alliance of Baptist Churches awaited registration confirmation.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group. Many political party leaders were former communists who manipulated the core attributes of their particular ethnic group, including religion, to strengthen their credibility with voters. For example, offices of local Bosnian Serb mayors in the RS were often decorated with religious icons, although few officials practiced religion in any meaningful sense. In recent years many Bosnians have turned to their respective religious leaders to fill the void left by politicians, who are perceived by the public as apathetic or corrupt. This enabled religious leaders to play an influential political role, often promoting nationalist platforms, in the 2006 national elections and subsequent government formation as well as in political programs.

The lines dividing politics, ethnic identity, and religion were often blurred, particularly during the period prior to the 2006 national elections and during the public debate over proposed changes to the Bosnian Constitution. Some religious leaders became increasingly political and vocal in this period and used religious sermons and services for political campaign purposes. Political candidates courted religious leaders during the campaign season and were often photographed together in campaign propaganda and media reports. Religious leaders also used their position to influence the election outcome by encouraging their communities to vote for certain individuals or parties. For example, prior to the elections Bosnia's Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter that was read in every Catholic church on July 2, 2006, in place of the traditional Sunday sermon. The letter reminded believers of the importance of their vote and encouraged Croat parties to form coalitions so that no Croat vote would be wasted. It also urged them to oppose U.S.-brokered constitutional amendments "through which war horrors would be legalized and the Croat people marginalized." During the preelection period, the media and others often criticized the head of the BiH Islamic community for his appearance at public events with presidential candidate Haris Silajdzic and for his public statements calling on Silajdzic to "write a new constitution" so Bosniaks would honor him as they do wartime president Alija Izetbegovic.

The State Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various churches or religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia. These individuals are employees of the municipality in which they teach but have been accredited by the religious body governing the curriculum. However, the law was not always fully implemented, particularly in segregated school systems or where there was political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level. During the period covered by this report, the entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four traditional religious communities - Muslim, Serb Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority.

Religious education is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with some exceptions, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the municipality's majority religion. By law, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) may choose not to attend the classes. However, students of the majority religion and sometimes also of minority religious groups faced pressure from teachers and peers to attend religious instruction, and most did so. Children who are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates often attend instruction of the majority religion, even if it is not the religion they practice at home. If a sufficient number of students of minority religious group(s) attend a particular school (20 in the RS, 15 in the Federation), the school must organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to the handful of minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it logistically difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation's five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a 2-hour-per-week elective course. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the "elective" 1-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools. Use of religious symbolism by the majority group in art classes, such as minority children in Bosniak majority areas being tasked to draw mosques or those in Christian majority areas being asked to draw crosses, continued to be a problem.

Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Visoko, Mostar, and Bihac, Muslim students may attend madrassahs. These Islamic secondary schools provide training for students who want to become religious officials as well as general education to prepare students for university studies. There is one Serb Orthodox secondary school in Foca. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Zepce, Banja Luka, Bihac, and Zenica, students may attend Catholic school centers. Although primarily Croat, these schools are open to students of other ethnicities and religious groups. Some of these centers have both primary and secondary schools, and although the principals are priests, the majority of teachers are not religious officials. The curriculum is a combination of Bosniak and Croat curriculums used in the Federation.

Facilities also exist for the three largest religious communities at the university level. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences is located in Sarajevo, the Serb Orthodox Seminary in Foca in the RS, and two Catholic theology faculties (one run by the Franciscans and one run by the diocese) in Sarajevo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to

safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases local governments made improvements in protecting religious freedom; however, serious problems remained, including an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedom occurred. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of vandalism against religious buildings or violence and harassment against religious officials or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles, intoxicated individuals, or mentally unstable persons were responsible for these attacks.

Lack of uniform protection posed obstacles to safeguarding minority rights, despite improved police and judicial protection for minorities in some parts of the country. Ethnic quotas set for the recruitment of new officers into police academies were observed, but reforms intended to establish a countrywide effective, professional, multiethnic police force failed. Police forces as well as entity and local governments frequently allowed or encouraged an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedom could take place. In some cases the reluctance of police and prosecutors to aggressively investigate and prosecute crimes against religious minorities remained a major obstacle to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. The appropriation of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes in combination with restrictions on religious services and ceremonies had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. Authorities of the majority religious or ethnic group often discriminated against those of the minority group in matters related to municipal services, including security and education.

Governments at the local level restricted religious services and ceremonies. In the eastern RS municipality of Bratunac, the Serb majority municipal assembly repeatedly denied a permit for the Islamic community to build a cemetery and memorial on its property surrounding a downtown mosque. Bosniak organizers hoped to bury 98 identified victims of a 1992 massacre in Bratunac in which more than 600 persons, including the local imam, were killed. Organizers planned to hold the burials at the mosque on May 12, 2007, the 15th anniversary of the massacre, but Serb veterans' associations and local residents protested the planned burials. The mayor and assembly denied the building permit, claiming that the proposed cemetery and memorial had not been envisioned in the town's urban plan. After more than a year of repeated requests and appeals from Bosniak organizers, the RS Government and the international community intervened, and the parties reached a last-minute agreement that enabled the burials to take place at a different location on the planned date.

Religious officials of Sarajevo's minority populations complained of discrimination by local authorities regarding the use of religious property, obstructionism in municipal services, and daily harassment such as the frequent towing of vehicles parked near churches and church offices.

In September 2006 in the eastern RS town of Zvornik, the Saint Sava primary school launched the new school year with a religious ceremony chaired by a Serb Orthodox priest in the presence of more than 100 Bosniak students and parents. The incident received strong condemnation from the Islamic community, Bosniak associations, and the RS Minister of Education and Culture, who called the decision "inappropriate." However, school officials saw no problem with the event and indicated that it was a 15-year tradition to begin the school year in this manner and that attendance was not obligatory.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or government-owned land. In these cases the buildings or monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethnoreligious group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation.

An illegally constructed Serb Orthodox church remained on the land of a Bosniak returnee in the town of Konjeric Polje in the eastern RS, despite the RS Ministry of Urban Planning's 2004 decision that the church should be removed. On September 11, 2006, for the second consecutive year, the local Orthodox priest celebrated Mass in the church, which was attended by a large number of antagonists singing nationalist songs and wearing nationalist clothing. Local police were present, and there was no violence. In June 2007 RS and Serb Orthodox Church officials agreed in principle to relocate the church but had not found an alternate location by the end of the period covered by this report. A wooden Serb Orthodox church unlawfully built on private Bosniak-owned land in the town of Kotorsko continued to be the source of legal and ethnic conflict. Although deadlines were set by authorities for removal of the church, no action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

The presence of a large stone cross and cement foundations for the eventual addition of more crosses in the ethnically divided town of Stolac in Herzegovina also remained contentious. In 2004 Federation authorities ordered the removal of the cross and foundations; however, the removal was delayed pending the outcome of a 2004 lawsuit on the legality of the Federation Government's decision. In September 2006 the Federation Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the law, and the Federation Ministry of Spatial Planning was able again to launch an initiative for removal of the cross and foundations. While the Federation Ministry of Spatial Planning had the legal authority to undertake such an initiative, it was reluctant to do so out of concern that the action would increase interethnic tensions during the election year. In May 2007 members of a Bosniak NGO illegally destroyed the additional foundations, but the cross remained.

The country's four traditional religious communities all had extensive claims for restitution of property that the communist government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II. The State Law on Religious Freedom provides religious communities the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout the country "in accordance

with the law." A special multiethnic restitution commission completed its mandate and delivered a draft restitution law to the Council of Ministers in early 2007 for approval. However, as of mid-2007 no action had been taken, and many believed that the law would not be passed without changes. In the absence of any state legislation specifically governing restitution, return of former religious properties continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials but was usually completed only in favor of the majority group.

Many officials used property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities. Other unresolved restitution claims were politically and legally complicated. For example, the Serb Orthodox Church continued to seek the return of the building that housed the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state parliament building is located. The Jewish and Muslim communities also asserted historic claims to many commercial and residential properties in Sarajevo. The Catholic community maintained a large number of similar claims in Banja Luka.

In May 2007 the Islamic community began proceedings against the RS city of Banja Luka seeking damages of approximately \$1.1 million (1.5 million Bosnian convertible marks) for the wartime destruction of all mosques in the city. The Islamic community filed the original lawsuit in 2000 but began proceedings again when an out-of-court settlement failed because the city would not make the requested admission of guilt.

During the period covered by this report, the Federation municipality of Travnik partially complied with a 2003 decision by the Human Rights Chamber (renamed the Human Rights Commission of the Constitutional Court) ordering the municipal government to relocate a public school housed in a building formerly owned by the Catholic archdiocese. The municipality returned half the building to the archdiocese for use as part of its Catholic school center. However, the other half remained in use as a public school. The court ordered the public school to move out of the building by July 1, 2006, but by that date authorities had not allocated funding for a new school building, and the building remained in use as a public school.

Minority religious communities also encountered difficulty in obtaining permits for new churches and mosques. The Catholic Church continued to seek permission, first solicited in 2000, to build a new church in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica but complained that the local authorities, a Bosniak majority, refused to grant the permit.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism against the Jewish community were infrequent. Jewish leaders noted a tendency to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with anti-Semitism, as the general public and the media often failed to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Public criticisms of Israeli policy during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese conflict did not include specific anti-Semitic elements.

In May 2007 a planned concert by Croatian singer Marko Perkovic Thompson was cancelled by Croatian Catholic Charity Association organizers due to security concerns. Plans for the concert had provoked numerous protests from the Jewish community and others who believe that Thompson's lyrics glorify the Ustasha and Nazis.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders did not always take positive steps to promote religious freedom. Compared to the previous reporting period, attacks on religious objects and religious officials increased significantly, particularly in the campaign months before the national elections, during which nationalist rhetoric employed by certain political parties heightened religious and ethnic tensions.

Minority religious buildings, clerics, and communities bore the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constituted the majority. Because they are powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings were favored targets. Most religious leaders severely criticized violence and nationalism against their own group but could be less vocal in condemning acts against members of other groups. Those in the majority religious or ethnic group had an advantage in employment opportunities.

Discrimination remained a serious problem in the RS, particularly in the eastern part, and in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination against non-Muslims appeared to worsen in some Bosniak-majority areas where more

conservative Islamic communities resided. Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital, preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city; however, complaints of discrimination persisted. Some non-Muslims reported feeling isolated and marginalized in the capital.

The number of incidents against religious symbols, clerics, and property in all three ethnic majority areas increased, especially during the period immediately prior to the October 2006 national elections. Local police generally did not conduct serious investigations into such incidents. For example, in July 2006 unidentified perpetrators sprayed gunfire into a Muslim cemetery in Trebinje, damaging several tombstones. In the same month and city, unidentified persons also threw an explosive device at the home of a Bosniak returnee. When police concluded that the attacks were the pranks of local youngsters, the local Muslim community called for the dismissal of the police chief for not performing a full investigation. Similar reports of local police assigning blame for these incidents on pranksters, drunkards, or the mentally unstable were frequent.

There were a number of acts of violence and vandalism against Muslim religious targets throughout the country. In October 2006 a rocket-propelled grenade destroyed a large portion of the Jasenica Mosque near Mostar; this was the most severe attack since the end of the war. The Jasenica Mosque became a source of controversy when local Croats objected to its reconstruction on grounds that its new design violated a law permitting only reconstruction in the same style as the original prewar building. City officials ordered removal of the mosque, but the order had not been carried out before the attack. In September 2006 the Carsijska Mosque in Bosanska Dubica was also repeatedly vandalized. In August 2006 an explosive device was detonated at the grave of former president Alija Izetbegovic, destroying his tombstone and leaving a large crater at the grave.

Serb Orthodox sites were also targets of vandalism. In December 2006 unknown individuals stoned the Orthodox church in Kakanj, and in November 2006 several gravestones in the Orthodox cemetery in the village of Mioci were damaged. In August 2006 unidentified persons wrote threatening, anti-Serb graffiti on the Serb Orthodox church in Petrovo. Also in August unknown perpetrators damaged several tombstones and broke a large number of vases at the Orthodox cemetery in Ljubinici and broke windows and damaged the entrance door of the Orthodox church in Gracanica.

Catholic religious objects were also the targets of vandalism. In September 2006 unknown persons broke the glass on the entrance door to a Catholic church in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica. The church was the subject of controversy because the Catholic community had requested a permit to build a new church, which local authorities had yet to approve. Also in September, in the Orasje neighborhood near Tuzla, persons damaged the doors and windows of the cemetery chapel and moved religious statues.

Protestant churches also were vandalized. On Easter Sunday 2007 several churches in Sarajevo were burglarized and documents about the congregation, specifically the lists of those who had been baptized, were stolen. Some churches faced repeated break-ins and complained that the local police made no efforts to find those responsible but instead intimidated church officials by calling them in for lengthy interrogations.

There were some reports that Muslims were offered economic incentives to worship and/or dress in a way that was different from traditional Bosnian Muslim custom. There also were reports that Muslim women were offered financial incentives to wear the veil and to practice a strict interpretation of Islam.

The leaders of the four traditional religious communities participated in the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continued to operate despite occasional significant disagreements and funding constraints.

The Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the country continued to meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern. During the week of ecumenical dialogue in April 2007, the head of the BiH Catholic Church, Vinko Puljic, led a service at Sarajevo's Orthodox cathedral, and the head of the BiH Serb Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Nikolaj, held a service at Sarajevo's Catholic cathedral.

The bishop of Mostar-Duvno-Trebinje-Mrkan Bishopric, Ratko Peric, met with the mufti of Mostar, Seid Effendi Smajkic, for the first time since the end of the war, and during Bajram Bishop Peric extended congratulations to Muslims in the region. Both events helped to reopen channels of communication in the country's most segregated city.

In September 2006 Serb Orthodox Bishop Vasilije and then-Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Mirsad Kebo negotiated to remove a Serb Orthodox church built on the site of a destroyed mosque in the eastern RS village of Divic. Although these negotiations marked a positive resolution to a controversial and longstanding conflict, the church had not been removed by the end of the period covered by this report.

In October 2006 experts from more than 15 states participated in a 3-day interdisciplinary conference on the research of the Holocaust in southeast Europe. The conference, held in Sarajevo, was the first of its kind in BiH.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government supported the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The Embassy publicly criticized instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encouraged political leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. The U.S. Government continued its strong support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic government, a policy intended to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

When the local alliance of Baptist churches encountered difficulties in registering 15 of its affiliated religious communities, the Embassy intervened on its behalf with the responsible officials at the Ministry of Justice.

The Embassy also continued to lobby for the adoption of a State Law on Restitution, which would assist religious communities in obtaining return of their former property.

The Ambassador met frequently with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work on interreligious dialogue and building a tolerant society. Other embassy personnel regularly met with representatives of all religious communities to discuss religious freedom concerns and also sponsored events for outreach to religious communities. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for Bosnian Muslims, hosted the Interreligious Council on several occasions, and played a critical role in encouraging local, entity, and state officials to secure a positive outcome for the Bratunac burials on May 12, 2007. The Ambassador is also a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversees the continued development of the memorial and cemetery dedicated to the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica-area Muslim men and boys in Potocari.

The U.S. Government funded the development of the countrywide human rights and democracy courses taught in 50 percent of all Bosnian elementary and secondary schools. During the period covered by this report, such a course was also included in all private Bosnian Catholic schools.

To promote interreligious dialogue, the Embassy continued to engage in an active outreach program with the religious communities at all levels, including hosting speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, and supporting a university affiliation program between the University of Sarajevo and Arizona State University to establish a graduate program in comparative religious studies. The Embassy's Democracy Commission approved a project proposed by Bosnia's Interreligious Council to promote awareness and understanding of the BiH Law on Freedom of Religion and to create a system through which the council could condemn desecration against religious property and persons. Funding from the Support for East European Democracy program enabled the Embassy's School Connectivity Program to develop and offer two modules on "Islam and Democracy" and "Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Democracy" to religious studies teachers throughout the country. The Catholic Church also approved the development of a module on "Catholicism and Democracy."

Released on September 14, 2007

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90167.htm)