

USDOS – US Department of State

2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Poland

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion. It states religion is a personal choice and that all churches and religious organizations have equal rights. A concordat with the Holy See defines relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Statutes determine relations between the government and 15 religious groups. A separate statute regulates the functioning of religious groups that are not covered by individual statutes. The law prohibits public speech offensive to religious sentiment and penalizes acts of violence motivated by religious differences. In July, the Provincial Administrative Court in Warsaw suspended the government's 2020 decision to invalidate the registration of the Reformed Catholic Church for recognizing same-sex marriage. The government significantly restricted the process for seeking the return of, or compensation for, private property seized under the Nazi occupation or during the Communist era. Revisions to the law that took effect in September made it impossible to challenge any administrative decision issued more than 30 years prior and ended any pending administrative challenges to those decisions. During the year, the government decided 38 religious communal property restitution cases out of 2,912 outstanding cases, compared with 26 cases decided in 2020. Some opposition parliamentarians and local government officials made antisemitic comments during the year. Some antisemitic discourse appeared in the government-controlled public media. Senior government officials participated in Holocaust remembrance events and publicly denounced antisemitism.

The national prosecutor's office reported that during 2020, the most recent period for which data was available, prosecutors investigated 346 religiously motivated incidents, compared with 370 in 2019. The report cited investigations into 147 antisemitic, 111 anti-Muslim, and 88 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. There were several physical attacks against Roman Catholic priests and incidents involving the disruption of religious services in Catholic churches around the country. There were also cases of desecration of Catholic and Jewish religious sites, such as churches, monuments, and cemeteries. In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 19 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Poland said they had negative feelings towards Jews.

The Charge d'Affaires, other embassy and consulate general staff, and visiting U.S. officials discussed with government officials antidiscrimination, the status of private property restitution, communal religious property restitution, and countering antisemitism. In July, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials, parliamentarians, directors of museums and research institutions, and representatives of the Jewish community to discuss private property restitution, antisemitism, and Holocaust remembrance and education. The Charge and other embassy and consulate general staff also met with Christian and Jewish leaders to discuss legislation restricting private property restitution, communal religious property restitution, Holocaust remembrance and education, and the community's concerns over intolerance and antisemitism. The embassy and the consulate general in Krakow engaged with Jewish leaders on countering antisemitism, and sponsored exchanges, roundtables, cultural events, and education grants promoting interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, amplifying those messages on social media.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38.2 million (midyear 2021). The 2021 Polish government statistical yearbook, which publishes the membership figures for religious groups that voluntarily submit the information for publication, reports almost 85 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic. The next largest religious groups are the Polish Orthodox Church, with approximately half a million members (Church representatives estimate that the number of Orthodox worshippers is well above one million as a result of an influx of Ukrainian and Belarusian migrants), and Jehovah's Witnesses, with approximately 115,000 members. Other religious groups include Lutherans, Pentecostals, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the Polish National Catholic

Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Church of Christ, Methodists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Buddhists. Some Jewish groups estimate there are 20,000 Jews, while other estimates, including by Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, 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.

The constitution states religious organizations may teach their faith in schools if doing so does not infringe on the religious freedom of others, and it 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 penal code criminalizes the public insult of an object of religious worship or a place dedicated to public observance of religious services as an offense to religious sentiment. The penalties range from a fine, typically 5,000 zloty (\$1,200), to a two-year prison term. The same penalties apply for incitement to hatred on the grounds of religious differences or the lack of religious affiliation. The law also provides for up to a three-year prison term for public insult of a person or a group of people and for violating the bodily integrity of a person on the grounds of their religious affiliation or lack of religious denomination.

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 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 170 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 states that relations between the state and all churches and other religious unions are based on 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, cochaired by the Minister of Interior and Administration and a bishop, currently the Archbishop of Krakow, which meets regularly to discuss Catholic Church-state

relations. The government also participates in a joint government-Polish Ecumenical Council committee, cochaired by a Ministry of Interior and Administration (MIA) undersecretary and the head of the Polish Ecumenical Council (an association composed of seven Christian denominations and two religious associations, all of them non-Roman Catholic), which meets to discuss issues related to minority Christian churches operating in the country. In addition, there are separate joint committees consisting of government representatives and representatives of the Evangelical Alliance, the Lutheran Church, and the Orthodox Church.

Religious groups not covered by 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 the group's 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 190 registered and statutorily recognized religious groups and organizations receive other privileges not available to unregistered groups, such as the right to acquire property, teach religion in schools, and selective tax benefits. They are also 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.

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 World War II. 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. Religious representatives on the joint commissions stated that parties continued to appeal final decisions by the commissions. The law does not address communal properties the government sold or turned over to new private owners after World War II.

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 properties in Warsaw 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 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 on 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

In January, the MIA refused to register the Multi-Denominational Church of Visual Artists for failure to meet formal registration requirements. The group had filed a motion for registration with the MIA in September 2020. In March, the MIA approved the registration of the National Catholic Church, and in December, it approved the registration of the Natural Church.

On July 6, the Provincial Administrative Court in Warsaw suspended an MIA December 2020 decision to remove the Reformed Catholic Church from the official registry of churches and religious denominations, determining the implementation of the ministry's decision could irreversibly affect the Church's ability to operate. The decision was to remain suspended until the Administrative Court ruled on the issue. The Church appealed the decision to the court on January 21, but at year's end, the suspension remained in place. While the removal is suspended, the Reformed Church may operate as before. Prosecutor General Zbigniew Ziobro had initiated a case to deregister the Reformed Catholic Church in July 2020 when he filed a motion with the MIA to invalidate the January 2020 registration of the Church, arguing that it had failed to meet several requirements. In September 2020, the MIA ruled the Church's registration invalid because registering the Church, the only registered group that recognized same-sex marriages, violated the constitution, which defined marriage as "a union of a woman and a man." In October 2020, the Church filed a motion with the MIA requesting it to reverse its decision. The Church and the ombudsman stated the MIA's decision was inconsistent with the constitutional provision providing for the autonomy and independence of religious organizations in relations with the state. According to the ombudsman, the prosecutor general's intervention following the registration of a religious group was unprecedented. In December 2020, the MIA upheld its previous decision to deregister the Church.

In an article published on August 5 by the Catholic News Agency, the head of the Polish Bishops' Conference criticized the government for imposing "unprecedented" severe restrictions on religious worship without proper consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki, the conference president, stated, "From a legal point of view, the Polish state, by imposing a kind of state 'interdict' [a prohibition on performing certain religious functions], did not retain the autonomy (sovereignty) of the Church," despite "constitutional and concordat guarantees." Gadecki said the Catholic Church "submitted to these unilateral decisions – not wanting to undermine the decisions of the state authorities in an exceptionally difficult situation." He noted, "The issue requires serious analysis and drawing the right conclusions for the future, for the sake of democracy, in which the principle of respect for religious freedom is of great importance."

According to MIA statistics, the religious community property commissions resolved 38 communal property claims during the first nine months of the year, out of approximately 2,912 pending claims by religious groups, compared with 26 claims resolved during the same period in the previous year. At the end of September, the commissions had partially or entirely resolved 2,893 of the 5,504 total claims by the Jewish community deemed valid by the commission (the commission had previously dismissed 40 as invalid), 992 of 1,182 claims by the Lutheran community, 376 of 472 claims by the Orthodox Church, and 90 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, leaving 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 World War II. 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, a case for restitution of the old Jewish cemetery in the city of Kalisz remained unresolved after 21 years.

During the year, the government significantly altered legal and administrative procedures for private property restitution and compensation. On June 24, parliament adopted a revision to the Code of Administrative Procedure that significantly restricted the ability of individuals to seek the return of private property seized under Nazi occupation or during the Communist era. The revised law made it impossible to challenge any administrative decision issued more than 30 years prior and ended any pending administrative challenges to those decisions. The legislation limited the primary process by which claimants could seek restitution or compensation for expropriated property, according to NGOs and lawyers specializing in the issue. Individuals who already successfully challenged administrative decisions were still able to seek return of their property or compensation in the courts. The President signed the legislation into law on August 14, and the law entered into force on September 16. On August 14, the World Jewish Restitution Organization issued a statement that said the law would make it "virtually impossible for all former Polish property owners to secure redress for property illegally seized during the Communist era."

During the year, Warsaw city authorities continued implementing a 2015 law with the stated purpose of ending abusive practices in the trading of former property owners' claims, whereby specialized law firms allegedly acquired restitution claims from former owners. The firms then reportedly sought large payouts or restitution from the city with little compensation returned to the original claimants. Legal experts expressed concern that the law limited the ability of claimants to reclaim property unjustly taken from their lawful owners during the World War II and Communist eras, including from Jews and members of other religious minorities. In November, Warsaw city authorities stated that since the 2015 law entered into force, the city had resolved approximately 378 dormant claims filed before 1950, an increase of 26 from the previous year. These included the rejection of 136 restitution claims against public properties, an increase of one since 2020. The rejected claims involved schools, preschools, a park, a police command unit site, a hospital, and city-owned apartment houses. There was no information available on the identity of those claiming prior ownership or how many of them belonged to religious minority groups.

A special government commission continued to investigate accusations of irregularities in the restitution of private property in Warsaw. 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 in response to the commission's decisions.

The Never Again Association reported several instances of local and central government officials making antisemitic statements in public or on social media during the year. On February 3, Mayor of Opatow Grzegorz Malecki posted a photo of Orthodox Jews on his Facebook page, accompanied by antisemitic comments, including, "I am not a biased antisemite, but as a person who searches for the truth, I wonder why, wherever [Jews] appeared, they were so disliked." He also stated that the Communist security service, which he said was "saturated with Jews who came to Poland on Soviet tanks straight from Moscow," was responsible for the 1946 Kielce pogrom, in which approximately 40 Jews were killed and approximately 40 were injured by Polish soldiers, police officers, and civilians.

Never Again reported that during the year, antisemitic discourse appeared in government-controlled public media, specifically during legislative work on revisions to the Code of Administrative Procedure, which affected the private property restitution process. On July 10, former anti-Communist opposition activist Andrzej Michalowski, participating as a guest in a debate on state-run public radio, said the "Jewish lobby" was trying to interfere with legislation affecting heirless property.

In February, police questioned Katarzyna Markusz, editor of the website Jewish.pl, on suspicion that she violated the article of the criminal code providing for sentences of up to three years in prison for those who "publicly insult the Nation or the Republic of Poland." In October 2020, Markusz wrote in an article, "Will we live to see the day when the Polish authorities also admit that hostility toward Jews was widespread among Poles, and that Polish complicity in the Holocaust is a historical fact?"

Police did not press any charges against Markusz, and in late February, the Warsaw-Ochota prosecutor's office discontinued the case.

In April, during a town council meeting, a member of the Olecko council stated "Jews are using the pandemic to murder Poles and take their houses....There are housing estates in Warsaw and they are empty, uninhabited. They are waiting for Jews. They will murder us and then take over. The Jews have not yet recognized Jesus; they are the chosen people and are waiting for the coming of the Messiah," the council member said.

On March 2, the Plock regional court acquitted three LGBTQI+ rights activists charged with offending religious sentiment in 2019. The activists had created and posted on various sites in the city of Plock posters of the icon of Virgin Mary with her halo painted in the colors of the rainbow flag. Unknown persons allegedly placed some posters on trash cans and portable toilets. The court noted the activists' actions were intended as a denunciation of a Catholic church in Plock for its Easter display describing LGBT as a sin. There were two appeals filed after the first instance court's verdict: one by the Plock local prosecutor's office, and another by the legal representative of Kaja Godek, the leader of the Life and Family Foundation (a pro-life organization), who served as an auxiliary prosecutor.

On June 30, the Bialystok regional court sentenced two men to 12 and 6-month prison terms, respectively, for incitement to hatred against Jews during a march organized by the National Radical Camp in 2016 in Bialystok. During the event, the men had chanted, "Zionists will hang on trees instead of leaves." The verdict remained subject to appeal.

In June, municipal authorities in the country's second largest city, Krakow, called for an end to the sale of so-called "lucky Jew" figurines and paintings, which depict Orthodox Jews with stereotypically antisemitic facial features counting gold coins. "These figurines are antisemitic, and it's time for us to realize that," Robert Piaskowski, the cultural representative of Krakow's mayor, stated.

On September 24, the Czeszochowa regional court discontinued a case against a man indicted for offending religious sentiment by using an icon of the Black Madonna of Czeszochowa with her halo painted in the colors of the rainbow flag during the Equality March in Czeszochowa in 2019.

In May, media reported the government-controlled National Freedom Institute awarded grants to an organization led by a student who made antisemitic comments, and to the Independent March Units, an organization closely affiliated with the Independence March Association, which human rights groups described as extremist and nationalist. In remarks to the media, Chief Rabbi Schudrich said, "The grants go far beyond the simple abuse of public funds and constitute active support of purveyors of antisemitism."

In June, media reported the government awarded grants worth more than three million zloty (\$740,000) to several organizations that human rights groups considered nationalist and antisemitic, including the Independence March Association, the National Guard Association, and All-Polish Youth.

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.

January, President Andrzej Duda and other political and religious leaders joined Holocaust survivors to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and commemorate the 76th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, commemorations were held primarily online. In his remarks, President Duda said, "The memory and the truth about the Holocaust will last forever. We contemporaries will carry it into the future, and we will pass to the next generations the message flowing from this place: Never again Auschwitz! No more genocide, hatred and racism." Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki wrote on Twitter, "The memory of the victims is an important part of our identity."

On January 21, President Duda hosted a virtual New Year's meeting for representatives of various churches, religious unions, and national and ethnic minorities. He thanked religious leaders for their service, which he said was "of special and enormous importance today for maintaining stability, unity in our society, [and] security and order in the Polish state."

On February 25, the director of the government Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), a research institution responsible for education and archives with the authority to investigate Communist and Nazi crimes against the Polish nation, announced he had accepted Tomasz Greniuch's resignation as head of the IPN branch office in Wrocław. Greniuch's appointment had been made public earlier in February and had received widespread criticism due to his past role as chief of the far-right National Radical Camp (ONR) in the city of Opole. Multiple pictures circulated in the media of Greniuch giving what appeared to be the Nazi salute during his time with ONR. President Duda and Prime Minister Morawiecki had called for Greniuch's resignation.

On March 24, the National Day of Poles Rescuing Jews, a holiday introduced in 2018 to honor citizens who risked their lives to save Jews during the Nazi occupation, President Duda awarded state medals to several citizens. In his remarks, the President said he would "be resolute in fighting, in my work, not only as president, but also afterwards, after concluding my term in office, all demonstrations of antisemitism in our country." He noted all demonstrations of antisemitism in the country were equivalent to "trampling on the grave of the Ulma family" (a Polish family killed by Germans during World War II for sheltering Jews), "because the actions of the [Ulma] family stemmed from love, whereas antisemitism equals hatred....We must never accept that, we must not remain indifferent."

On April 19, President Duda and his wife laid a wreath before the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Monument in an annual commemoration of the 78th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. In his remarks, Duda said, "I frequently repeat the notion that it was an uprising of 'Our Own.' They were Our Own. Some people may say, 'our Jews.' No. They were Our Own." On the same day, Prime Minister Morawiecki lit a candle in front of the monument and wrote on his Facebook page, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was one of the great heroic acts of opposition to evil, so significant in our history."

On June 14, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture of National Heritage and Sport Piotr Gliński commemorated the 81st anniversary of the first transport of Poles to Auschwitz. Gliński laid flowers at the former concentration camp. In his address he called for remembrance stating, "It is important that we keep the memory of what happened in the inhuman land of Auschwitz, of all those who went through the hell of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camps."

On July 4, Deputy Minister of Culture, National Heritage, and Sport Jarosław Sellin laid flowers in the city of Kielce to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Kielce pogrom. In his remarks, he said the memory of the pogrom should be a warning against hatred on the grounds of nationality and antisemitism, noting, "If anyone expresses such views, especially after the Holocaust, it is a moral scandal and a political embarrassment."

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In October, the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport released a statement announcing it “recognizes the IHRA’s working, legally nonbinding definition of antisemitism as an important and self-evident point related to counteracting this phenomenon.” On October 14, speaking at the International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism in Sweden, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture, National Heritage, and Sport Glinski said Poland opposed all forms of racism and antisemitism. He said numerous efforts were being made to prevent antisemitism in all areas of life. He added that the country was participating in international programs on Holocaust remembrance and prevention, and as a result, the number of hate crimes motivated by antisemitism had gradually decreased since 2018.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The national prosecutor’s office reported that during 2020, the most recent period for which data were available, prosecutors investigated 346 religiously motivated incidents, compared with 370 in 2019. The report cited investigations into 147 antisemitic, 111 anti-Muslim, and 88 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. During 2019, there were investigations into 182 antisemitic, 112 anti-Muslim, and 76 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. The Never Again Association and religious groups stated government tracking of religiously motivated incidents was not comprehensive or systematic.

There were several physical attacks against Roman Catholic priests and incidents involving the disruption of religious services in Catholic churches around the country. There were also cases of desecration of Roman Catholic and Jewish religious sites, such as churches, monuments, and cemeteries.

On September 15, a man entered a Catholic church in Szczecin, broke a wooden cross hanging on the wall, and physically attacked the priest who tried to stop him from causing further damage. The priest was taken to the hospital with a broken jaw. Prosecutors charged the man with physical assault, public insult, and making illegal threats against the priest, and subsequently placed him in pretrial detention for three months.

On January 12, police detained three men who painted neo-Nazi symbols on the outer wall of the Jewish cemetery in Oswiecim. On January 13, the local prosecutor’s office charged two of the men with public promotion of fascism, and the third with destruction of a monument (the cemetery wall is registered as a provincial monument). The men expressed regret for their actions and participated in an “educational program” organized by the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Oswiecim. Together with volunteers from the Auschwitz Jewish Center and International Youth Meeting Center, the men also repainted the cemetery wall and cleaned up the town’s Great Synagogue Memorial Park. Their trial started on June 11 and was ongoing at year’s end.

On February 17, unknown individuals cut the hands off a statue of the Virgin Mary standing in front of a Catholic church in Czestochowa.

On February 26, police arrested a woman on charges of setting fire to a Catholic church in Lublin. She was charged with deliberately setting a fire that could pose a threat to the life and health of persons and property. She was placed in pretrial detention for two months.

On March 17, a woman disrupted a Mass in St. Mary’s Basilica in Krakow by taking off her clothes and spitting on the priest.

On March 19, a man holding an axe entered the property of a Catholic parish in Otwock and threatened to kill the local priest and a woman who tried to intervene. Police identified the individual and charged him with making criminal threats.

On May 3, a man entered a Catholic church in Duszyniki-Zdroj during Mass and pointed a fake gun at the priest.

On May 11, the Poznan-Old Town regional court began the trial of a man on charges of public incitement to murder a priest, hatred on the grounds of religious differences, and insulting followers of the Catholic Church. While participating in a Mr. Gay Poland event in Poznan in 2019, the man had simulated cutting the throat of an effigy of Archbishop of Krakow Marek Jedraszewski, who had previously criticized “LGBT ideology.” The case was pending before the court at year’s end.

On June 16, an unknown person entered a church in Konin, smashed a statue of the Virgin Mary, and attempted to damage a painting of Jesus.

Also on June 16, five 12-year-old boys damaged 63 tombstones at a Jewish cemetery in Wrocław. Police identified the boys, who claimed their older friends had encouraged them to damage the tombstones and that the stones were to be used for “building a base.” Police handed the case over to family court.

On June 22, unknown persons vandalized two figures of the Virgin Mary outside a Catholic church in Szczecin.

On June 26, three teenagers vandalized 67 tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in the town of Bielsko-Biala. Authorities found some tombstones broken and others tipped over. On June 28, police identified the perpetrators and handed the case over to the family court.

On June 30, the Wrocław District Court sentenced a man who stabbed a priest in front of a church in Wrocław in 2019 to a 12-year prison term for attempted murder.

Also on June 30, members of the Catholic nationalist group All-Polish Youth deposited a pile of rubble with a note reading, “This is your property” outside the Israeli embassy in Warsaw to protest Israel’s criticism of legislation limiting restitution and compensation claims for private property confiscated during World War II and the Communist era. The board of the Warsaw Jewish Community condemned the actions and appealed to the President and other representatives of the government to do so, saying the actions “offend the memory of millions of Jews, Polish citizens who were killed during World War II.” The board also expressed hope prosecutors and police would investigate the incident and punish the organizers and the perpetrators.

On September 24, the Koszalin regional court began a trial of four women’s rights activists indicted for maliciously disrupting religious services during protests in October 2020 against the Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling the same month that restricted access to abortion. During the incident, four persons had entered a Catholic church in the city of Koszalin while services were proceeding, stood in front of the altar, and displayed posters proclaiming a woman’s right to an abortion.

On October 5, authorities found antisemitic graffiti on nine wooden barracks at the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The graffiti included statements in English and German and two references to Old Testament sayings frequently used by antisemites. Police were still looking for the perpetrators at year’s end. Beata Szydło, a member of the European Parliament and of the Law and Justice party and a former Prime Minister, wrote on her Twitter account, “This incident requires a strong reaction from the Polish services, especially since this is probably an intentional, external provocation. Those responsible for the profanation @MuseumAuschwitz must be caught and punished.”

On October 18, a man used an electric saw to cut down a wooden cross that had been standing in the center of the city of Zielona Góra for decades. He recorded the event and posted it on the internet. On October 19, police located the perpetrator and charged him with offending religious feelings.

In April, the Wrocław prosecutor’s office discontinued an investigation into a speech delivered by Jacek Miedlar, a former Catholic priest, in 2019 during a nationalist demonstration. During the event, Miedlar and participants shouted, “Jewish communists worse than the Nazis,” “Down with the Jewish occupation,” and “This is Poland, not Polin.” (Polin is the Hebrew word for Poland and has a special connotation as a Jewish homeland.) In the justification for discontinuing the investigation, prosecutors said that the general intention of Miedlar’s speech, in which he referred to “Jewish communists” and “Jewish executioners,” was to “strengthen patriotic attitudes.” The prosecutors said that Miedlar’s use of the words “ungrateful Jew” and “executioner” to assess the attitude of a particular person of Jewish nationality did not constitute hate speech, but rather were expressions of legally permitted criticism.

On October 20, the Wrocław regional court sentenced Miedlar to 10 months of community service for public incitement to hatred against Jews for a speech he made in 2018 in which he attributed to people “of Jewish nationality” “actions to legalize pedophilia” and “actions against Polish citizens.” Miedlar also questioned the scale of losses and harm suffered by Jews during World War II. In a separate case, on September 13, the same court sentenced Miedlar to one year of community service for incitement to hatred against Ukrainians and Jews for a 2017 speech in which he condemned “Jews intoxicated with Talmudic hatred,” spoke of a “Jewish Marxist horde,” and said that “synagogues only stand on Polish soil as a result of our lack of prudence.” Both verdicts are subject to appeal.

In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey based on data from December 2019-January 2020. According to the survey, 19 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Poland said they had negative feelings towards Jews. Thirty-one percent said they would be “totally uncomfortable” or “uncomfortable”

with having Jewish neighbors. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they agreed or disagreed. The proportion who responded “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” with the following statements were – “the interests of Jews in this country are very different from the interests of the rest of the population” (39 percent); “there is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world” (32 percent); “Jews have too much influence in this country” (33 percent); “Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society” (36 percent); “Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (36 percent); “many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later” (30 percent); “Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them” (31 percent); “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” (38 percent).

According to a poll of public opinion on the Roman Catholic Church conducted by the Warsaw-based Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) in September, 45 percent of residents had a favorable opinion of the Church, an increase of two percentage points since March, while 41 percent had a negative view, a drop of six points from six months earlier.

According to a public opinion poll conducted by CBOS in February, 38 percent of respondents held a positive attitude towards Jews (compared with 30 percent the previous year). In a separate poll conducted by CBOS from September to November 2020, 19 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “War is a terrible thing, but it is good that as a result of it there are not as many Jews in Poland as there used to be.”

The Institute for Catholic Church Statistics reported that in 2019, the most recent year for which data were available, 37 percent of residents attended Sunday Mass regularly, compared to a post-Communist high of 50 percent in 1990.

According to Never Again and the Open Republic Association, there was a growing antisemitic narrative appearing in the public sphere. The Never Again Association reported antisemitic content in online messaging, as well as on what were considered to be nationalist and far-right YouTube channels and internet media websites. For example, on February 4, former priest Jacek Miedlar said on wRealu, a YouTube channel generally viewed as right-wing, “Jewish institutions try by all means to block the truth. In my latest book...I clearly indicate that this practice of clinging to a lie, producing lies without any [hesitation], is almost a genetic principle of Jewish communities.” On June 28, prominent publicist Rafal Ziemkiewicz wrote on his Twitter account, “The Germans smelted soap from the Shoah victims, and modern Jews learned how to smelt gold from them. From the legal point of view, what the ‘Holocaust Industry’ is doing is so-called complicity after the fact.”

On July 2, publicist Rafal Otoka-Frackiewicz stated on his YouTube channel, “Jews are still furious with Poland for introducing regulations that theoretically prevent them from extorting from Poland the property of people who have nothing to do with Israel.”

On November 11, several hundred persons participated in a nationalist march on Independence Day in the city of Kalisz, during which some participants burned a book symbolizing the Statute of Kalisz, a 13th-century document that regulated the legal status of Jews in Poland and granted them special protections. March participants also chanted “Death to Jews” and “No to Polin, yes to Poland.” On November 14, President Duda wrote on his Twitter account, “I strongly condemn all acts of anti-Semitism. The barbarism perpetrated by a group of hooligans in Kalisz contradicts the values on which the Republic of Poland is based. And in view of the situation on the border [the ongoing Belarus-Poland border crisis] and propaganda campaigns against Poland, it is even an act of treason.” Also on November 14, the spokesperson for the District Prosecutor’s Office in Ostrow Wielkopolski announced prosecutors had opened an investigation into the incident. On November 15, Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration Mariusz Kaminski announced police had detained three men for organizing the demonstration. They were charged with public incitement to hatred, public insult on national grounds, and public incitement to commit crimes against other persons based on their national and religious identity.

At an antivaccine protest that took place in Glogow on July 19, participants blamed Jews for being responsible for the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the website Notes from Poland. Protesters chanted, “Jews are behind the pandemic,” and, “They rule the world.” Police arrested three protesters.

In December, television station IPN broadcast a program celebrating Feliks Koneczny, the author of several anti-Jewish tracts in the 1930s and 40s. In his writings, Koneczny cast the country as a Latin/Roman Catholic society engaged in an eternal and mortal struggle against “Jewish civilization.”

On January 17, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 24th Annual Day of Judaism, which featured a series of religious and cultural events, mostly organized online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The principal events took place in Warsaw and included a joint prayer at the Jewish

cemetery conducted by Bishop Romuald Kaminski and Chief Rabbi Schudrich, a special religious service, a concert of Jewish music, and a panel discussion. In addition, other Catholic dioceses organized various online events around the country, including in Krakow, Szczecin, and Lodz.

On January 26, the Catholic Church celebrated the 21st Annual Day of Islam, with the stated purpose of promoting peace among religious groups. The Church hosted an online event titled "Christians and Muslims jointly protecting places of worship" that included discussions, readings from the Bible and Quran, and prayers.

On February 22, representatives of various religious communities announced the creation of the "Community of Conscience – Coalition for Mutual Respect." The coalition included 12 persons from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches, as well as Jewish and Muslim leaders. In their official declaration, the members of the group explained their goal would be to counteract hate speech and hate crimes and to encourage dialogue, understanding, mutual respect, and building the community, despite differences.

On March 25, the Polish Council of Christians and Jews named a Lutheran nun "A Person of Reconciliation" in recognition of her contribution to mutual understanding and reconciliation between Poles and Jews. On October 3, the Polish Council of Christians and Jews gave awards to a Catholic theology researcher, a Lutheran female deacon, and a Pentecostal pastor for their contributions to the development of Polish-Jewish and Christian-Jewish dialogue and cooperation. On October 3, the Council organized a joint Catholic and Jewish prayer to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah.

Human Library projects, funded by European Economic Area grants and coordinated by NGOs Diversja Association and Lambda Warsaw, continued online and in several cities and towns around the country, including Gdansk, Jarocin, Torun, and Wroclaw. 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

The Charge d'Affaires, the Consul General in Krakow, and visiting U.S. Department of State representatives met with government officials from the presidential chancellery; the foreign affairs, justice, interior, and culture ministries; and parliament to discuss communal property restitution, legislation affecting private property restitution and compensation, antisemitism, and antidiscrimination.

The Charge and embassy and consulate general staff also met with members and leaders of the local Jewish and Christian communities to discuss issues of concern, including private and communal property restitution, proposed legislation restricting private property restitution and compensation, and the communities' concerns regarding intolerance and antisemitism.

From July 2-11, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials, parliamentarians, directors of museums and research institutions, and Jewish community leaders to discuss Holocaust education, research, and commemoration, proposed legislation restricting private property restitution, and antisemitism.

On July 4, the Special Envoy attended the 75th anniversary commemoration of the pogrom in Kielce. During the event, she said "Hatred and xenophobia can occur anywhere and at any time, as they still do around the world today. We must do everything in our power to improve understanding, promote inclusion and tolerance, and ensure that hatred and xenophobia do not have a place in our modern societies."

On October 27, an embassy official participated in the annual meeting of the International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. The foundation acknowledged contributions to its permanent fund over the past year, including the U.S. government 2020 contribution of \$2 million. The meeting focused on conservation efforts at the former concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and on virtual education programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April, to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Charge used the embassy's social media accounts to express solidarity with the annual "Daffodils" social and educational program conducted online by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The program aims to educate the public about the uprising by handing out thousands of paper daffodils on Warsaw streets in remembrance of the Jews who fought and died in the uprising.

Throughout the year, the embassy and consulate general in Krakow used social media to call for respect and tolerance for all religions, condemn violence and discrimination based on religious beliefs, and highlight U.S. government support for combating antisemitism and protecting places related to the Holocaust.

In June and July, staff from the consulate general in Krakow participated in the Krakow Jewish Community Center's Virtual Ride for the Living by pledging to bike, run, or walk 60 miles (the distance between the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Krakow) in tribute to Holocaust memory and to celebrate the rebirth of Jewish life in Krakow.

The embassy continued to sponsor exchange programs, award grants, participate in conferences, and financially support educational and cultural events to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The embassy sponsored individuals to participate in programs on interfaith dialogue and religious freedom, preserving Holocaust history, and countering Holocaust distortion and denial.

On August 17, an embassy official addressed 30 Polish educators competitively selected to attend the course, "Learning from the Past, Acting for the Future." The seminar focused on the Holocaust, antisemitism, and human rights in the contemporary world.

Also in August, an official from the consulate general in Krakow spoke to a group of Polish teachers at the Galicia Jewish Museum who were participating in a program designed to educate educators on teaching the Holocaust.

The consulate general in Krakow provided grant funding for educational and cultural projects connected to the promotion of religious freedom or combating antisemitism.

In August, the consulate general funded an intensive, one-week online course on teaching the Holocaust in context, led by staff of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow. The course targeted a select group of civic education and history teachers to supplement their knowledge of aspects of Jewish history, antisemitism, and the Holocaust. It also presented methods and themes related to the Holocaust as a starting point to educate youth in tolerance and respect for other cultures.

In October, the consulate general funded the Antidiscrimination Academy for teachers and NGO activists, run by the Auschwitz Jewish Center. During the one-week course on antisemitism and other types of prejudice, participants acquired knowledge about the historical and contemporary status of Jews and other social minorities in the country. Attendees visited Auschwitz-Birkenau to examine the social and psychological processes that led to the Holocaust.

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