

# **POLAND 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and states that religion is a personal choice, and all churches and religious organizations have equal rights. An agreement with the Holy See determines relations with the Roman Catholic Church and grants it privileges not accorded to other religious groups. Statutes adopted because of agreements between the government and other churches and religious organizations determine relations with those groups. The criminal code prohibits public speech offensive to religious sentiment. The Supreme Administrative Court dismissed an appeal that, if successful, would have led to the deregistering of the Union of Progressive Jewish Communities in Poland. The government made a final determination on 60 communal property restitution cases involving claims by religious communities during the year, out of approximately 3,600 outstanding. The leader of the governing Law and Justice Party (PiS) met with Jewish groups after they wrote to him expressing concerns over growing anti-Semitism. Parliament asked the interior minister to respond after Muslim groups wrote to the speaker of the lower house asking him to protect the Muslim minority. The interior minister ordered an investigation after Holocaust survivor groups discovered that a 1999 video of naked people laughing and playing tag in a concentration camp gas chamber had been filmed in the former Nazi Stutthof concentration camp. PiS members made statements against Muslim migrants, and one party parliamentarian tweeted an anti-Semitic comment. The PiS leader denounced anti-Semitism, and President Andrzej Duda said the country had a duty to speak out about the extermination of its Jewish population by the Nazis during WWII.

According to government figures from 2016, which civil society groups said were not comprehensive, anti-Muslim incidents almost doubled to 360 compared with 2015, while anti-Semitic incidents declined by 23 percent to 160. Jewish groups reported an increase in anti-Semitic incidents during the year but did not cite figures. In June German Muslim students reported harassment in Lublin, and the Muslim Cultural Center in Warsaw cancelled an open house after online threats. A Pew Research Center poll found two thirds of respondents held negative views of Muslims, and a Warsaw University study reported a rise in anti-Semitic attitudes in the country. In November some marchers chanted Nazi and anti-Semitic slogans at a nationalist Independence Day march attended by tens of thousands of persons in Warsaw. In April some participants chanted anti-Muslim slogans at a demonstration in Warsaw by several hundred supporters of a group widely

described as extremist. In March a group burned an effigy of a Jewish woman in Warsaw. There were incidents of vandalism at Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant sites.

The U.S. embassy and visiting U.S. government representatives met with government officials and representatives of Jewish groups to discuss the status of private and communal property restitution and anti-Semitism. The Ambassador appealed to extend the provisions of draft private property restitution legislation to cover American citizens and Holocaust victims, survivors, and their heirs. The Ambassador, other embassy staff, and visiting U.S. government delegations raised concerns with government officials that draft legislation criminalizing the attribution of Nazi Third Reich crimes to the Polish state or nation could undermine free speech and media freedom, and inhibit discussion of the Holocaust. The embassy and consulate general in Krakow engaged with Jewish and Muslim leaders on countering anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and sponsored events, including exchange programs, roundtable discussions, cultural events, and education grants, that promoted interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 38.5 million (July 2017 estimate). The Polish government Statistical Yearbook, which publishes the membership population for religious groups that voluntarily submit the information for publication, reports that 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The next largest religious groups are the Polish Orthodox Church, which reports just over half a million members, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, which reports more than 120,000 members. Other religious organizations include Lutherans, Pentecostals, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the Polish Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Church of Christ, Methodists, Latter-day Saints, Hare Krishnas, and Buddhists. Jewish and Muslim groups estimate their numbers to be 20,000 and 25,000, respectively, although some Jewish groups estimate their number could be as high as 40,000. Approximately 10 percent of Muslims are ethnic Tatars, a group that has been present in the country for several hundred years. A Central Statistical Office February survey reported 92.8 percent of citizens aged 16 years or older identify as Roman Catholic and 1.4 percent as belonging to other denominations, including Orthodox (0.7 percent), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.3 percent), or other Protestant groups (0.2 percent). Just over 3 percent reported no religious identification, and less than 0.1 percent identified with non-Christian religions.

## 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 Catholic Church shall be determined by an international treaty concluded with the Holy See and by statute, and relations with other churches and religious organizations by statutes adopted pursuant to agreements between representatives of these groups and the Council of Ministers.

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

The criminal code outlaws public speech that offends religious sentiment. The law prescribes a fine, typically 5,000 zloty (\$1,400), or up to two years in prison for violations.

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, 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 165-registered religious group 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 provides equal protection to all registered religious groups. In accordance with the law, the government and the Roman Catholic Church participate in the Joint Government-Episcopate Committee, co-chaired by the minister of interior and administration and a bishop, currently the Archbishop of Gdansk, which meets regularly to discuss Catholic Church-state relations. The government also participates in a joint government-Polish Ecumenical Council committee, co-chaired by a Ministry of Interior and Administration (MIA) undersecretary and the head of the Polish Ecumenical Council (an association composed of six denominations and two religious associations, all of them non-Roman Catholic Christian), which meets to discuss issues related to minority Christian churches operating in the country.

Religious groups that are not the subject of specific legislation may register with the MIA, but registration is not obligatory. To register, the law requires a group to submit a notarized application with the personal information of at least 100 citizen members; details about the group's activities in the country; background about its doctrine and practices; a charter and physical address; identifying information about its leaders; a description of the role of the clergy, if applicable; and information on funding sources and methods of new member recruitment. If the ministry rejects the registration application, organizations 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, or 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 own property or hold bank accounts in their name. The 185 registered and statutorily-recognized religious groups receive privileges not available to unregistered groups, such as selective tax benefits – they are exempt from import tariffs and property taxes and income tax on their educational, scientific, cultural, and legal activities, and their official representatives are also

exempt from income and property taxes – and the right to acquire property and teach religion in schools.

Four commissions oversee communal religious property restitution claims, one each for the Jewish community, the Lutheran Church, and the 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 and that was nationalized during or after WWII. The law does not address communal properties the government sold or turned over to new private owners after WWII. A separate commission overseeing claims by the Catholic Church completed its work several years ago. The MIA and the respective religious community each appoint representatives to the commissions. The law states decisions by the commission ruling on communal property claims may not be appealed, but the Constitutional Tribunal ruled in 2013 that parties could appeal commission decisions in administrative courts. There have been no reports of parties filing such appeals.

The law authorizes Warsaw city authorities to expeditiously resolve long-standing restitution cases affecting Warsaw properties now being used for public purposes. Warsaw city officials must post a notification of specific public properties for a six-month period during which original owners of the property must submit their claims. At the end of the six-month period, Warsaw city authorities may make a final determination on the disposition of the property, either declaring that the property shall remain public and not be subject to any future claims, or returning the property or equal compensation to the original owner.

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

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

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

### **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph:* The Supreme Administrative Court dismissed an appeal that, if successful, would have led to the deregistering of the Union of Progressive Jewish Communities in Poland. Warsaw city authorities began implementing a private property law, specific to that city, that observers said could extinguish potential claims by private individuals, including Jews and members of other religious minorities, of public properties seized in WWII or the communist era. The government made a final determination on 60 communal property claims of religious groups during the year, out of approximately 3,300 cases pending. Then-Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak ordered a follow-up investigation after Holocaust survivor groups determined a 1999 video of naked persons laughing and playing tag was recorded in the gas chamber of the former Nazi Stutthof concentration camp. PiS members made statements criticizing Muslim migrants, and one party member wrote an anti-Semitic comment on his Twitter account. Some government officials called for the resignation of the human rights ombudsman after he said on television that the nation had taken part in implementing the Holocaust. President Duda stated the country had a duty to speak out about the extermination of Jews, and the leader of PiS denounced anti-Semitism.

On April 3, the Supreme Administrative Court dismissed an appeal of the court's own 2014 decision reversing a lower court ruling that would have led to the deregistration of the Union of Progressive Jewish Communities in Poland (Beit Polska). The appeal had been brought by another Jewish organization which had filed the original deregistration.

The MIA approved the registration of one religious group during the year, the Evangelical Methodist Church in the Republic of Poland.

According to MIA statistics, the religious community property commissions made a final determination (“resolved”) on 60 communal property claims during the year, out of approximately 3,300 pending communal property claims by religious groups. The commission handling Jewish communal property claims had partially or entirely resolved 2,770 of the 5,554 claims the Jewish community had submitted by its 2002 filing deadline. The commission handling Lutheran property claims had partially or entirely resolved 946 of the 1,200 claims filed by its 1996 filing deadline. The commission handling Orthodox Church restitution had partially or entirely resolved 264 of 472 claims filed by the 2005 deadline, and the property commission for all other denominations had partially or entirely resolved 87 of 170 claims.

Critics continued to state the laws on religious communal property restitution did not address the issue of disputed communal properties now privately owned, and the government left several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. For example, in a number of cases, buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after WWII. The Jewish community continued to report the pace of Jewish communal property restitution was slow, involved considerable legal expense, and often ended without any recovery of property or other compensation for claimants.

The European Shoah Legacy Institute, an independent think tank that monitored restitution issues, stated in April that Poland was the only country in the EU that had not established a comprehensive restitution regime for private property taken during the Holocaust or the communist era.

Warsaw city authorities began implementing the 2015 law that critics stated might extinguish potential claims by private individuals, including Jews and members of other religious minorities, on public properties seized in WWII or the communist era. By year’s end, the city had listed 63 public properties for which the six-month public notification period had expired. No individuals submitted prior ownership claims for 54 of the 63 public properties. Of the nine other properties for which individuals did submit prior ownership claims, the city refused four and was still reviewing the remaining five claims at year’s end. The city determined that the 58 properties for which there were no claims or for which it rejected prior ownership claims would remain public property and would not be subject to any future claims. The public properties involved included schools, preschools, a park, and a police command unit site. There was no information available as to the identity of the prior ownership claimants or whether any belonged to religious minorities.

In June a special government commission formed during the year under Deputy Justice Minister Patryk Jaki to investigate accusations of irregularities in restitution of private property in Warsaw called Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz and other officials to testify on several occasions. Waltz refused to appear before the commission and questioned its authority. One of the cases about which the commission called Waltz involved a property for which her husband's family received compensation and was reported as formerly owned by a Jewish Holocaust victim. The mayor's husband returned the compensation paid to him as required by a December 22 ruling of the commission, which required all beneficiaries of the property to return a total of more than 15 million zloty (\$4.3 million) to city authorities.

On October 11, the Ministry of Justice announced comprehensive private property restitution draft legislation that would block any physical return of former properties, whether the properties were currently privately or publicly owned, provide compensation of 20-25 percent of the property's value at the time of taking in cash or government bonds, and set a one-year claims filing period. The legislation drew intense media coverage and public scrutiny. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups expressed concern the legislation would exclude foreign potential claimants, many of whom were Holocaust survivors or their heirs. At year's end, the justice ministry had not submitted the draft legislation to the Council of Ministers (cabinet) for review and approval before sending to parliament.

In February the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage financed the restoration of 21 historic gravestones at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.

In December parliament voted to allocate 100 million zloty (\$28.7 million) to restore the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, and the Ministry of Culture transferred the funds to the Cultural Heritage Foundation, which was to oversee the restoration project in cooperation with the Warsaw Jewish Community. Warsaw Jewish Community president Anna Chipczynska stated the donation was "the most important gesture of the Polish state aimed at protecting Jewish heritage."

By year's end, draft legislation was pending in parliament that made it a crime punishable by up to three years in prison to attribute to the nation or the state any responsibility for Nazi crimes or war crimes or other crimes against peace or humanity. Government officials stated the legislation was designed to deter public use of phrases like "Polish death or concentration camps," instead of "Nazi



German concentration camps in occupied Poland during World War II.” These officials said the former contradicted historical truth and harmed the country’s good name. Critics stated the law would violate freedom of expression, stifle academic freedom, harm Holocaust remembrance, and strain relations with Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

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

In October President Duda signed into law a bill creating the National Freedom Institute – Center for Civil Society Development to support NGOs, including Catholic and other religiously affiliated groups. In response to a request by the human rights ombudsman, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights issued an opinion on the law. The OSCE office stated the legislation was discriminatory because it contained language focused on Christian heritage and “nurturing Polishness,” which might imply that “associations focusing on these issues may receive preferential treatment as opposed to other religious or believer communities or organizations.”

On August 4, the Union of Jewish Communities sent a letter to PiS Chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski expressing deep concern over increased anti-Semitic attitudes, hate speech, and violent behavior, which it said left the group fearing for Jews’ future in the country, and asking for intensified government action. On November 17, Kaczynski met with Jewish community leaders to discuss their concerns. He stated he had been shocked upon hearing of recent anti-Semitic incidents and promised to help set up a meeting between Jewish community representatives and then Interior and Administration Minister Blaszcak.

In June the Muslim Religious Union, Muslim League, Muslim Association of Cultural Education, and Association of Muslim Students in Poland sent a written appeal to Sejm (lower house of parliament) Speaker Marek Kuchcinski to take actions to protect the Muslim minority. The letter stated negative references to Islam in media and political debate reinforced anti-Muslim attitudes and might increase anti-Muslim behavior. On September 21, the Sejm Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities reviewed the letter and asked the minister of internal affairs and administration to provide it with information on the scale of the problem and government actions to address it. At year’s end, the committee was waiting for a detailed response from the ministry.

On December 1, then-Interior and Administration Minister Blaszczak requested prosecutors review a 1999 video, “Game of Tag,” showing naked men and women playing tag and laughing in the gas chamber of the former Nazi Stutthof concentration camp, located approximately 22 miles east of Gdansk. In November several groups, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Organization of Holocaust Survivors in Israel, wrote in protest to President Duda, asking who had authorized the video, what rules of conduct existed at the site, and whether the government had conducted an investigation of the circumstances surrounding the making of the video.

Piotr Tarnowski, the director of the state-run Stutthof Museum and Memorial, said one of his predecessors had given permission for the video based on a different script. An Israeli lawyer who helped identify the site where the video was recorded, David Schonberg, told the BBC that more important than the video itself was the “apparent indifference” to it in Poland.

Member of the European Parliament and PiS member Ryszard Czarnecki said on June 6, following a terrorist attack in London, that officials needed to protect the country from terrorist attacks by barring the entry of Muslim migrants. He added that the children of Muslim migrants, many of whom were European citizens, often carried out terrorist attacks after being trained by ISIS.

On June 8, in reference to a music festival in the country whose organizer said it was open to migrants in Germany, PiS posted on its official Twitter account, “Do you really want to have an event in Poland with the participation of Muslim immigrants?” and encouraged people to retweet the message.

On August 2, PiS member Bogdan Rzonca tweeted, “I wonder why there are so many Jews among those performing abortions, despite the Holocaust.” Several politicians, including a PiS deputy Sejm speaker, condemned the statement. Rzonca later apologized.

In June Human Rights Ombudsman Adam Bodnar acknowledged on state-run television channel TVP Info that his nation took part in the Holocaust, saying, “there is no doubt that the Germans were responsible for the Holocaust, but many nations took part in its implementation. Among them – and I say this with regret – the Polish nation.” Some government officials called for his resignation, and Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Dziejczak called Bodnar’s comment “scandalous.” Bodnar later said he had meant “some Poles had committed crimes against Jews.”

On January 13, President Duda hosted a holiday meeting with Jewish community leaders, including Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich. The president said he was extremely pleased Jewish culture was reviving and that so many Poles supported this resurgence. He added that the Jewish and Polish people had coexisted in the country for more than a thousand years, and Jews had contributed greatly to the development of the country's culture and science.

In August Krystyna Pawlowicz, a PiS Member of Parliament, wrote on Facebook that the government should seek help for its claim for German reparations from "the best American Jewish law firms."

On September 18, PiS leader Kaczynski denounced anti-Semitism as a dangerous phenomenon expressed through hostility toward Israel and praised the state of Israel at a ceremony honoring Poles who had protected Jews during the Holocaust.

In February the government's Institute of National Remembrance published online what it described as the most complete list of Auschwitz extermination camp Nazi SS commanders and guards. The institute said it hoped some of the persons listed could still be brought to justice.

On June 15, then-Prime Minister Beata Szydlo attended and spoke at the 77th anniversary of the first deportation of Poles to Auschwitz at a ceremony at the site of the Nazi death camp.

On October 11, President Duda hosted a 75th anniversary commemoration of the establishment of the Żegota Council to Aid Jews. The council was an underground organization established for rescuing Jews in the German-occupied part of the country during WWII.

On November 15, speaking at the opening of the Jewish Historical Institute's new exhibition on the Warsaw Ghetto's Underground Archive, President Duda stated, "Our duty is to speak the truth about the extermination of Jews." Historian and social activist Emanuel Ringelblum, who gathered documentary evidence of life in the Warsaw Ghetto and the fate of Jews under the Nazi occupation, created the archive in 1940.

On July 3-7, the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Center in Lublin, a local government institution that worked to preserve Jewish heritage in the city, held the first international reunion of Jewish Lublin residents and their descendants as part of a

celebration of the 700th anniversary of the city's founding. The gathering included a conference, workshops, and artistic events. Before WWII, Jews constituted one third of Lublin's population.

On December 12, parliament hosted a ceremony in which newly sworn-in Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki lit a candle in a "hanukiah," or nine-branched candelabra, with Rabbi Shalom Stambler from the Chabad community in honor of the first night of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

The government continued to fund exchanges with national participants and U.S. and Israeli Jews to foster dialogue on restitution, the Holocaust, and interfaith issues.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

*Summary paragraph:* According to national prosecutor figures, which religious groups and NGOs said were not comprehensive, prosecutors investigated 582 religiously motivated incidents in 2016. Anti-Muslim incidents almost doubled to 363, compared with the previous year, while anti-Semitic incidents declined by 23 percent, to 160. Jewish groups reported an increase in anti-Semitic incidents during the year, without citing figures. In June German Muslim students reported Lublin residents spat on and threatened them, and the Warsaw Muslim Cultural Center cancelled an open house after online threats. A Pew survey found two thirds of respondents held negative views of Muslims, and a Warsaw University study reported a rise in anti-Semitic attitudes. An Independence Day march in Warsaw in November, in which tens of thousands of persons participated, included some Nazi and anti-Semitic symbols and chants, although the main slogan was "We want God." Participants at a march in April in Warsaw chanted anti-Muslim slogans. Various groups, one of which recorded itself burning an effigy of a Jewish woman in Warsaw, continued to espouse anti-Semitic views. On October 7, up to a million Catholics prayed the rosary for the country and the world along the country's borders. Some participants cited fear of Islam as among the reasons they joined in the prayers. A Catholic bishop apologized to the Jewish community on the 76th anniversary of the Jedwabne pogrom, and the Catholic Church again organized a Day of Islam and a Day of Judaism to promote interreligious harmony. Vandals targeted Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant sites.

The national prosecutor's office reported that during 2016, the most recent period for which data were available, prosecutors investigated 582 religiously motivated incidents. The report cited 363 anti-Muslim incidents, almost double the 192 recorded in 2015, while anti-Semitic incidents decreased by 23 percent, to 160 from 208. Prosecutors investigated 59 incidents against Christians, compared with 52 in 2015. The NGO Never Again and religious groups stated government tracking of religiously motivated incidents was not systematic; police, prosecutors, and the MIA all kept their own sets of numbers, which did not agree with each other.

On June 28, German Muslim students visiting Holocaust memorials in the east of the country told a German radio station they were yelled at, spit on, and threatened by residents of Lublin during their trip.

On June 13, the Muslim Cultural Center in Warsaw canceled an open house after nationalist websites posted hostile comments and threats against it. The open house was part of the nonprofit Civic Education Center's "Four Corners of Warsaw – Young Tour Guides in a Multicultural Capital" program, in which Warsaw high school students presented information on Islam and the Warsaw mosque to help combat negative stereotypes and prejudices. Organizers decided to cancel the event out of safety concerns for the students, but they promised to organize a similar event at a different time, which would ensure participants' safety. Also in June the imam of the Poznan mosque received threats via email and social media after several websites posted a manipulated video falsely showing the imam saying, "If Islam wins, Christians will have to pay a ransom." The Poznan deputy mayor stated he would ask police to enhance security around the mosque.

Members of the Warsaw Jewish Community and the Union of Jewish Communities of Poland described an increase in anti-Semitic incidents during the year, including hostile phone calls to community centers, vandalism of offices, attempted forced entry of community property, and a fake bomb that a tour group's security team found at a Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.

A coalition of groups widely considered extremist, including National Radical Camp (ONR) and All-Polish Youth – Młodzież Wszechpolska (MW) – organized an Independence Day march in Warsaw on November 11 under the slogan, "We want God." While many of the tens of thousands of marchers carried Polish flags without signage, some participants displayed large signs reading, "White Europe of brotherly nations" and "Clean Blood," and Celtic crosses and banners depicting a

far-right symbol from the 1930s. These participants also chanted, “Sieg Heil,” “Pure Poland,” and “Jews out of Poland.” One participant interviewed on TVP television said he was taking part in the demonstration “to remove Jewry from power.” A smaller counterprotest took place at the same time. The two demonstrations were largely peaceful, but there was one report of extremist participants pushing and kicking several women who were holding a “Stop Fascism” banner and chanting antifascist slogans. Police arrested 45 counterprotesters and none of the participants in the main march.

The Israeli foreign ministry issued a statement describing the march as dangerous and “instigated by extremists and racists,” and calling on the Polish government to take action against the organizers. One march participant was quoted in the press as saying he was not a fascist and was marching to honor those who had fought for the country’s freedom. He estimated 30 percent of the marchers had extremist views, while the rest were “walking peacefully, without shouting any fascist slogans.”

Following the march, President Duda stated, “There is no room for ... anti-Semitism in our country.” PiS leader Kaczynski said the country’s traditions had nothing to do with anti-Semitism and stated that unfortunate incidents at the march were probably a provocation designed to harm the country’s image. Then-Interior Minister Blaszczak stated he did not see the racist signs and praised the patriotism of marchers who displayed Polish flags, calling it “a beautiful sight.”

Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Glinski called for an investigation into whether the far-right signs violated the law. On November 20, the Warsaw prosecutor’s office announced that it was launching an investigation into “public propagation of fascism and calls for hatred” during the march.

On March 24, 12 persons from Poland, Belarus, and Germany killed a sheep and chained themselves together naked to the main gate of the Auschwitz former Nazi death camp. The demonstrators stated it was an anti-war protest. They were charged with insulting a memorial site and killing an animal. On October 17, the Oswiecim local court began a trial of the 12 demonstrators, which continued at year’s end.

On August 21, the Przemyśl local court sentenced 20 persons to between four and 10 months of community service for disrupting the June 2016 religious procession of Greek Catholic and Orthodox Church members marching to commemorate Ukrainian soldiers who fought for Poland from 1918 to 1920.

On January 30, the Warsaw North City Center prosecutor's office indicted one person for disrupting a Catholic Mass during the reading of a letter by the Polish episcopate calling for a total ban on abortion in April 2016.

According to a survey the Center for Social Opinion Research issued in February, anti-Semitic attitudes declined; 26 percent of respondents reported holding negative attitudes towards Jews, compared with 37 percent in 2016. On the other hand, the 2017 Polish Prejudice Survey by the Warsaw University Prejudice Research Center found an increase in anti-Semitic attitudes, with 43 percent reporting they would not accept a Jew as a close family member, compared with 30 percent in 2016; 27 percent reported they did not want Jewish neighbors, compared with 14 percent in 2016.

A Pew Research Center survey released in July found 66 percent of the population had negative views about Muslims, unchanged from the previous year. According to an Ipsos poll in May commissioned by TVP public television, 46 percent of respondents strongly opposed accepting Muslim refugees into the country, while 4 percent strongly supported it. Another 27 percent said Muslim refugees should probably not be admitted, while 19 percent said they probably should be.

In January approximately 50 non-Jews donned kippahs at a restaurant in Warsaw, the Foksal Cafe, to condemn anti-Semitism and demonstrate solidarity with the Jewish community. The event was in response to unsigned social media posts, which also generated online debate, stating that a bartender at the restaurant had ejected two customers for discussing Israel on New Year's Day. The restaurant's management said the customers had been ejected for engaging in anti-Christian speech about the Virgin Mary while under the influence of alcohol.

On April 29, several hundred supporters of ONR marched through Warsaw to mark the 83rd anniversary of the group's founding before WWII. During the march, some participants shouted anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant slogans such as "no Islam, terrorists, Muslims in our country." According to a member of NGO Never Again, police took no action against the demonstration and forcibly removed a group of counterprotesters who had sat down in front of the ONR marchers.

In October Never Again reported the Kielce district court began proceedings in a criminal defamation case against one of its members, Anna Tatar, editor of the group's magazine. Organizers of the annual Eagle's Nest music festival, which

Never Again said featured extremist bands, Nazi salutes, and the use of Celtic crosses, alleged Tatar had defamed them in a 2016 interview when she said, “during the Eagle’s Nest festival fascist ideas are promoted, and such events must not take place in Poland.” If convicted, Tatar could face up to one year in prison. At year’s end, the court proceedings were ongoing.

On March 21, a group of Warsaw residents celebrating the first day of spring burned an effigy of what they referred to as “a Jewish woman” and posted a videotape of it online. In the video’s comments section, the group wrote that the puppet “symbolizes what is ugly, cold, and bad.” One of the participants added the comment, “this mug, this big nose, so well-known in Polish history.”

On April 13, the Wroclaw Appellate Court reduced a first-instance court sentence of Piotr Rybak from 10 to three months’ imprisonment. The court had convicted Rybak of public incitement to hatred on religious grounds for burning an effigy of an Orthodox Jew during a 2015 anti-immigrant demonstration in Wroclaw.

The National-Social Congress, an association of groups widely described as extremist, invited a prominent American activist, who described himself as an identitarian and whom CNN called a white nationalist, to speak at a November 10 conference titled, “The Future of Europe; the Vision of the Demise of the West,” on the eve of the country’s Independence Day celebrations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on October 26, strongly protesting the visit as promoting intolerance, including anti-Semitic ideas, and stating such ideas contradicted the law. After the MIA Office of Foreigners issued a five-year Schengen zone entry ban on the invitee at the request of the country’s Internal Security Agency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the invitee cancelled his trip.

Groups such as National Rebirth of Poland and Blood and Honor continued to espouse anti-Semitic views, but authorities did not link any of them to specific incidents of violence or vandalism.

On March 2, Stanislaw Michalkiewicz, a commentator on Radio Maryja, run by a conservative Catholic group, said on his regularly scheduled broadcast that young people were rejecting the “stinky legends” told to them by Jewish communists and looking for their roots and real heroes.

On April 28, the Wroclaw prosecutor’s office discontinued the investigation into ONR Lower Silesia branch chief Justyna Helcyk for inciting hatred against Muslims and racial minorities during her speech at the ONR’s 2015 “In Defense of



Christian Europe” demonstration in Wroclaw. Prosecutors decided Helcyk’s speech did not constitute hate speech.

On February 27, the Lublin district court sentenced five men to suspended prison sentences of between six and eight months for public offense and incitement to hatred for hanging anti-Semitic posters around the city of Lublin between 2012 and 2014. One of the convicted men was a former worker of the state museum on the site of the Majdanek German Nazi concentration camp.

On October 7, the Catholic feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and the anniversary of the Christian victory over the Ottoman Turks at the 16th century naval battle of Lepanto, up to a million Catholics recited the rosary and prayed along the country’s international borders “to save Poland and the world.” On its website, the Solo Dios Basta (Only God Suffices) Foundation, a Catholic lay organization that organized the event, attributed the Lepanto victory to the recital of the rosary, “that saved Europe from Islamization.” At a Mass during the event broadcast by Radio Maryja, Archbishop of Krakow Marek Jedraszewski called on believers to pray “for the other European nations to make them understand it is necessary to return to Christian roots ...” Archbishop of Poznan Stanislaw Gadecki told private radio broadcaster RMF, “the key objective of this manifestation is to pray for peace.” According to press reports, organizers stated that the prayers were not directed against any group, but some persons cited fears of Islam among their reasons for participating.

In August private television station Republika TV adapted the “Arbeit macht frei” (“Work sets you free”) sign above the gates of Auschwitz into a parody illustration featuring a “Reparations set you free” slogan for a story about the call by some lawmakers for Germany to make reparations to the country for its losses in WWII. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum criticized the broadcast, writing on its Twitter account, “the primitive manipulation of painful symbols shows the moral level and understanding of history by its authors.”

On July 10, Catholic Bishop Rafal Markowski, head of the Polish Bishops’ Conference’s Council for Religious Dialogue and the Polish Episcopate Committee for Dialogue with Judaism, issued an apology at the ceremony marking the 76th anniversary of the Jedwabne pogrom, in which the town’s Jews were killed by their Catholic neighbors.

In June the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, an international NGO, recognized the Church of All Saints in Warsaw as a “House of Life” for helping Jews during

WWII. In a letter to participants in the ceremony, President Duda described Poles who risked their lives to help Jews as “the nation’s heroes.”

In January Holocaust survivors, politicians, and religious leaders gathered to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

There were incidents of vandalism targeting property associated with religious sites.

In December the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland reported a Jewish cemetery in the eastern town of Siemiatycze had been desecrated. Construction workers found human remains on a privately owned commercial lot located within the original boundaries of the cemetery and immediately adjacent to the current boundaries of the cemetery. Although the law requires construction activities to cease immediately and the police to be contacted in such circumstances, the dirt and human remains were removed from the site and construction initially continued. An initial review indicated local and regional authorities had not followed correct procedures in approving the construction permit for the site. Local prosecutors opened an investigation, which was continuing at year’s end.

On August 31, Maszewo village police announced an investigation into possible desecration of a burial site after reports a building contractor had bulldozed an old Jewish cemetery in the town and turned up human remains. The land where the cemetery had been located was added to a local register of protected sites prior to its purchase for development, but the owner stated she had not been aware of this designation prior to finding the human remains.

On August 5, unknown perpetrators vandalized a Protestant church with offensive graffiti in the northern town of Biala Piska.

On July 12, unknown perpetrators damaged a religious figure standing outside a Roman Catholic church in Warsaw.

In November unknown attackers smashed approximately a dozen windows at a mosque and Muslim cultural center in Warsaw. Imam Youssef Chadid blamed the attack on a “not very friendly” atmosphere in the country that he said misrepresented Islam. The imam appealed to the government to speak out against attacks on Muslims. Police were investigating the crime at year’s end.

On January 17, the Catholic Church celebrated the 20th annual Day of Judaism, which featured numerous events throughout the country, including meetings, lectures at schools, film screenings, and exhibitions. The main celebrations took place in Kielce and included prayers in front of monuments commemorating Holocaust victims, a theological discussion conducted by Catholic bishops and rabbis, and a religious service in Kielce Cathedral. Former and current Chairman of the Polish Episcopate Committee for Dialogue with Judaism – Bishops Mieczyslaw Cislo and Rafal Markowski – and Chief Rabbi Schudrich participated in the religious service.

On January 26, the Catholic Church celebrated the 17th annual Day of Islam with the stated purpose of promoting peace among religious groups. The Church hosted an event titled “Christians and Muslims – the Addressees and Tools of God’s Mercy” in Bialystok, which included discussions, readings from the Bible and the Quran, and prayers. Chair of the Polish Episcopate Committee for Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions Bishop Henryk Ciereszko and representatives of the Bialystok Muslim religious community attended the event. On September 24, the Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims organized a conference celebrating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the council, an association made up of lay members of their religions, who described their main role as promoting interreligious dialogue and respect for various religions and cultures.

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews continued to organize annual conferences and ceremonies, including the Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church and “Close Encounters of Christians and Jews” to encourage tolerance and understanding, as did a Catholic and Orthodox Churches bilateral commission.

The Polish Ecumenical Council hosted conferences and interfaith dialogue. For example, on October 29, the Lublin branch of the council co-organized an international ecumenical congress titled Lublin – City of Religious Agreement 2017, which focused around a debate about different Christian traditions and their attitude towards ecumenism. On November 25, the council organized an ecumenical women’s conference in Warsaw, which gathered more than 30 women from eight different Christian churches.

Human Library projects, funded by European Economic Area grants and organized by the Citizens for Democracy Foundation, continued in various cities, including Olsztyn, Krakow, and Lodz. Under the project, a diverse group of volunteers, including representatives of various religious groups, told their stories to

individuals who could “borrow” them like books. The stated intent of the project was to foster greater tolerance, including religious tolerance.

On March 27, the Jewish advocacy organization American Jewish Committee held an opening celebration for its new Central European headquarters in Warsaw.

A Central Statistical Office February survey found nearly 95 percent of Poles identified themselves as religious, and half attended religious gatherings on a weekly basis.

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

The U.S. Ambassador, other embassy and Krakow consulate general officers, and visiting U.S. Department of State representatives met with government officials from the interior, foreign affairs, and treasury ministries; the presidential chancellery; parliament; and the city of Warsaw. They discussed the state of private and communal property restitution to religious groups and members of religious minorities. They also appealed to the government to extend the provisions of draft private property restitution legislation to cover American citizens and Holocaust survivors and their heirs, who would otherwise be unable to make restitution claims if the legislation were enacted in its unchanged form.

In February the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials in Warsaw to discuss Jewish community property and private property restitution issues and social welfare benefits for Holocaust survivors. He visited the southern part of the country and met with Jewish community members to discuss restitution of Jewish cemeteries. He also visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and discussed Holocaust education programs and outreach. He later visited Krakow’s historic Jewish quarter and attended a Shabbat dinner at the Jewish Community Center.

On several occasions, the Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. government officials raised concerns with government and parliamentary officials about the draft legislation pending in parliament that would make it a crime to attribute to the Polish nation or state any responsibility for Third Reich crimes.

The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general staff met with members of the local Jewish community and Muslim and Christian leaders, to discuss private and communal property restitution, and the communities’ concerns over rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. In March the Ambassador spoke

at the gala celebration of the opening of the American Jewish Committee's Central European office in Warsaw. He highlighted the revival of Jewish life in the country and U.S. government support for Holocaust education, measures to counter anti-Semitism, and cultural exchanges in support of religious freedom and tolerance. On April 24, embassy and consulate general staff marched in the International March of the Living, an annual educational program that brought individuals from around the world to the country to study the history of the Holocaust. On June 22, the Ambassador participated in the Ride for the Living, a cycling event in which participants biked from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to the Krakow Jewish Community Center to celebrate and support the revival of Jewish life in the country.

The embassy continued to employ exchange programs, student roundtables, and grants for education and cultural events to promote religious freedom and tolerance. On October 8-9, an embassy grant supported a "Teaching about genocide" conference organized by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The conference was part of a cooperative agreement between the embassy and the museum to select and send teachers and educators on a Holocaust teacher-training program in the U.S. More than 180 teachers from various cities attended the event. The embassy funded the travel of four Polish teachers to the U.S. for training it organized with the POLIN museum and sponsored by the Association of Holocaust Organizations. The embassy provided financial and organizational support to Jewish cultural festivals in Warsaw, and Bialystok to promote interreligious understanding and tolerance. The consulate general in Krakow provided financial support to international programs at the Auschwitz Jewish Center for Genocide and Religious Persecution Prevention and the Galicja Museum in Krakow. The consulate general also hosted an international speaker from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, who engaged audiences on teaching about the Holocaust.