

# POLAND 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## 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. Separate statutes determine relations between the government and 15 religious groups. A separate statute regulates the functioning of other religious groups. The law prohibits public speech offensive to religious sentiment and penalizes acts of violence motivated by religious differences.

The Warsaw District Court sentenced two men to prison terms of 65 months and three years, respectively, after convicting them of planning a terrorist attack against Muslims in 2019. The government approved the registration of one religious group and rejected the registration applications of five others during the year. In October, the Provincial Administrative Court in Warsaw annulled the government's 2020 invalidation of the Reformed Catholic Church's registration for recognizing same-sex marriage. The religious community property commission resolved 100 religious communal property restitution cases – including 95 by the Jewish community – out of 2,874 cases outstanding. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported instances of antisemitic remarks by opposition members of parliament (MPs), and parliament reprimanded four opposition MPs for displaying an antisemitic banner in 2019. Senior government officials participated in Holocaust remembrance events and publicly denounced antisemitism.

According to the national prosecutor's office's most recent data, prosecutors investigated 477 religiously motivated incidents in 2021 – 240 antisemitic, 131 anti-Muslim, and 106 anti-Roman Catholic – compared with 346 in 2020. There were several antisemitic demonstrations during the year, in some of which there were calls for the killing of Jews. Two NGOs reported growing antisemitism on social media. There were incidents of vandalism of Roman Catholic and Jewish religious sites, including churches, monuments, and cemeteries, and disruption of Catholic masses.

The U.S. Ambassador, other U.S. embassy and Krakow consulate general staff, and visiting U.S. officials met with government officials to discuss antidiscrimination, the status of private property restitution, communal religious property restitution, and countering antisemitism. In November, the Special Advisor on Holocaust Issues and the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials, directors of museums and research institutions, and representatives of the Jewish community to discuss private property restitution, antisemitism, and Holocaust remembrance and education. The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general staff also met with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders to discuss private property restitution, communal religious property restitution, Holocaust remembrance and education, concerns over intolerance and antisemitism, and the communities' response to the inflow of refugees from Ukraine. The embassy and the consulate general 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 38.1 million (midyear 2022). The 2022 Polish government statistical yearbook, which publishes the membership figures for religious groups that voluntarily submit the information, reports 85 percent of the population identify as Roman Catholic. The next largest religious groups are the Polish Orthodox Church, with approximately a half million members, and Jehovah's Witnesses, with approximately 115,000 members. Polish Orthodox Church representatives were unable to estimate the total number of Orthodox worshippers in the country, which increased as a result of more than 1.5 million Ukrainian war refugees, as well as Belarusian migrants, registering for long-term residence.

Other religious groups include Lutherans, Pentecostals, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the Polish National Catholic Church, the Reformed 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 (\$1,100), 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 persons 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.

Separate laws govern the relationship of each 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, 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. There are an additional 171 registered religious groups and five aggregate religious organizations (the Polish Ecumenical Council, Polish Buddhist Union, Biblical Society, Evangelical Alliance, and Council of Protestant Churches) for which there are no individual statutes defining their relationship with the state. The status of these groups and organizations is regulated under the Law on Guarantees for Freedom of Conscience and Religion.

The law states that relations between the state and all churches and other religious unions are based on respect for freedom of conscience and religion. This includes separation of churches and other religious groups from the state; freedom to perform religious functions; equality of all churches and religious groups, 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 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. In addition, there are separate joint committees consisting of government representatives and representatives of the Evangelical Alliance, Lutheran Church, and Polish 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 191 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 receive 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. According to religious representatives on the joint commissions, parties continue 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 restitution of property that previously belonged to private individuals. Members of religious groups, like other private claimants, may pursue restitution through the courts. A law that came into force in September 2021 prohibits challenges to any administrative decisions made 30 or more years earlier, restricting the ability of individuals to seek the return of private property seized during the Nazi occupation or communist era. Only individuals who successfully challenged administrative decisions prior to enactment of the law are able to seek return of their property or compensation in 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 paying monetary compensation to the original owner.

In accordance with the law, all public and private schools teach optional 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 request to take an ethics class instead of a religion class or opt out of both classes.

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 of the government and appointed by parliament.

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

### **Government Practices**

In January and July, the Warsaw District Court sentenced one man to five years and five months in prison and another man to a three-year prison term for planning a terrorist attack against the Muslim community in the country. According to media reports, the men were members of an extremist far-right group that operated in the country until November 2019 and were planning to attack Muslims with explosives. The government did not disclose the names of the two men or of the group to which they belonged. The Internal Security Agency detained the two men in 2019.

On September 15, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the 2012 conviction of Polish musician Dorota Rabczewska for insulting religious sentiment violated her right to freedom of expression and ordered the government to pay her €10,000 (\$10,700) in damages. The ECHR found that while

Rabczewska had made statements that “could shock or disturb some people,” they were protected under the European Convention on Human Rights as “they did not incite to hatred or religious intolerance.” A Warsaw court had found Rabczewska guilty and fined her 5,000 zloty (\$1,100) following a 2009 press interview in which she said that it was “difficult to believe in the Bible as it ‘was written by someone wasted from drinking wine and smoking weed.’”

On January 12, the Plock District Court upheld a 2021 Plock Regional Court ruling that acquitted three LGBTQI+ rights activists charged with offending religious sentiment in 2019. The activists had created and posted at various sites in the city of Plock posters of an icon of the Virgin Mary with her halo painted in the colors of the rainbow flag. Unknown persons had reportedly placed some of the posters on trash cans and portable toilets.

On October 3, police charged two women with offending religious sentiment for carrying a picture of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo during an equality march in Czestochowa in 2021.

In May, the MIA approved the registration of the Christian Brotherhood Community. The MIA also denied the registration applications of four religious groups on the grounds that they had failed to meet registration requirements: the Evangelical Brotherhood Convent (applied in October 2021), the Church of Jesus Messiah Merciful (applied in September 2021), the Polish Evangelical Deaconry (applied in January 2021), and Harmony with Nature (applied on June 14). In addition, the MIA discontinued the administrative proceedings to register the group Friendship Family (applied in October 2020), stating that the group of citizens filing the application had not created a religious community as defined in the law on freedom of conscience and belief. The group filed a request for reconsideration of its application, which was pending at year’s end.

On October 13, the Provincial Administrative Court annulled the MIA’s 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 Reformed Catholic Church’s ability to operate. In 2020, the MIA ruled the group’s registration, approved in January of that year, was invalid because registering a religious group that recognized



same-sex marriages violated the constitution, which defines marriage as “a union of a woman and a man.”

According to MIA statistics issued in November, the religious community property commissions during the year had resolved 100 communal property claims out of approximately 2,874 pending claims by religious groups, compared with 38 claims resolved during the same period in 2021. Of the 100 resolved claims, 95 were by the Jewish community, three by the Orthodox Church, one by the Lutheran Church, and one by an unidentified member of the “all other denominations” group. As of September 27, the commissions had cumulatively either partially or entirely resolved 2,988 of the 5,504 claims by the Jewish community that the commission deemed valid. In May, Kalisz city authorities and the Union of Jewish Communities finally resolved the restitution case of the old Jewish cemetery in the city, which had remained unresolved for more than 20 years. As of October 19, the commissions had also resolved 993 of the 1,182 claims by the Lutheran Church and 95 of 170 claims by all other denominations, as well as 379 of 472 claims by the Orthodox Church as of mid-August.

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.

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 had entered into force, the city had resolved approximately 646

dormant claims filed before 1950, an increase of 268 in the total of resolved claims since the previous year. These included the rejection of a total of 301 restitution claims against public properties since 2015, an increase of 165 since 2021. 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. Deputy Mayor of Warsaw Tomasz Bratek stated that his office was committed to the proper adjudication of claims under its jurisdiction, but that because some previous decisions were erroneous, the office needed to be cautious and thorough.

The Never Again Association, an NGO, reported instances of parliamentarians from the opposition Confederation Party, widely described as right wing, making antisemitic statements in public, including on the floor of the legislature, or on social media during the year.

On January 15 according to the Never Again Association, Confederation Party MP Grzegorz Braun said during a parliamentary group meeting that statesmen, including the country's President, were "no longer just ritually bowing to Jews in New York" but were also following a political correctness model according to which "no one dare to speak in an unsentimental-idealistic way" about Jews and others for fear of punishment. On December 26, according to the Never Again Association, Confederation MP Krzysztof Bosak said during a YouTube interview, "I see politicians lighting all candles, but not Advent candles," which the NGO stated was a condemnation of the President's customary public candle lighting for Hanukkah.

On February 23, the parliamentary ethics committee reprimanded four Confederation Party parliamentarians for displaying a banner with the words, "Vaccinations set you free," that was modeled on the inscription displayed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, during an antivaccination protest that parliamentarians organized in December 2021. Prime Minister Mateusz

Morawiecki criticized the banner on social media, stating, “The scenes from outside the *Sejm* [lower house of parliament] using the German slogan, which was intended to be a mockery of millions of victims of German concentration camps, are a dramatic and dark picture of how the sacred memory of monstrous German crimes can be harmed.” In a February 8 ethics committee meeting, one of the four Confederation parliamentarians, Janus Korwin-Mikke, said that Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele was better than those advocating mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations.

In January, the National Police approved a new action plan for 2022-2025 against hate speech and hate crimes based on nationality, ethnicity, race, and religion as well as the promotion of fascism and other totalitarian ideologies. The plan followed the first action plan for 2018-21 and used the non-legally binding International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism.

In June, media outlets reported the government awarded grants to two organizations that human rights groups called nationalist and antisemitic: the Independence March Association, and its closely affiliated partner, the Independent March Units.

On January 16, Chairman of the ruling Law and Justice Party Jaroslaw Kaczynski stated, “If Poland is to have a future, attacks on the Catholic Church must not be tolerated.” Kaczynski added that the Catholic Church’s mission was closely linked with Polishness and Polish history, and anyone who threatened one also threatened the other. His remarks came during a speech outside of a church after he had attended Mass.

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.

On November 4, parliament voted to lift the legal immunity of an opposition MP, Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, so that prosecutors could charge her with “malicious disruption of a religious service” and offending religious sentiment. In 2020, Scheuring-Wielgus displayed a banner protesting a Constitutional Tribunal ruling against abortion in front of the altar of a Catholic church.

Multiple members of the government supported Holocaust education, remembrance, and commemoration and publicly spoke against antisemitism on multiple occasions. To mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on January 27, President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Morawiecki, and Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau posted messages on social media commemorating Holocaust victims, and Minister Wojciech Kolarski from the Presidential Chancellery participated in a ceremony with a small group of Holocaust survivors and others. Due to COVID-19 concerns, commemorations occurred primarily online.

On January 18, President Duda hosted a New Year's meeting for representatives of various churches, religious groups, and national and ethnic minorities. In his opening remarks, President Duda underlined the importance of the country's traditions, under which different faiths lived together and shared common values.

On April 28, President Duda participated in the March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau, an annual educational program that brings individuals from around the world to study the history of the Holocaust. In a post-march address at Birkenau, he said, "We shout out our 'No' to hatred! No to antisemitism!... The one who commits murders, who violates international law, must be held liable, severely and unconditionally. No more war! No more Holocaust! May the memory of those murdered live eternally!"

On April 19, Minister Kolarski, Deputy Culture Minister Jaroslaw Sellin, and parliamentarians participated with Jewish community leaders and others in a wreath-laying ceremony before the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Monument to commemorate the 79th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. President Duda and Prime Minister Morawiecki paid tribute to the participants in the uprising on social media.

On July 22, Minister Kolarski and Civic Coalition MP Michal Szczerba participated in the march to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the deportation of Polish Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka death camp.

On July 28, Prime Minister Morawiecki told members of the International Auschwitz Council, an advisory body to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, that "responsibility for the museum, its mission, and the commemoration of the

victims of one of the greatest acts of genocide in world history is a responsibility to the whole world.”

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

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

The national prosecutor’s office reported that during 2021, the most recent period for which data were available, prosecutors investigated 477 religiously motivated incidents, compared with 346 in 2020. The report cited investigations into 240 antisemitic, 131 anti-Muslim, and 106 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. During 2020, there were investigations into 147 antisemitic, 111 anti-Muslim, and 88 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. Information on the number of investigations that resulted in prosecutions or convictions was unavailable. Civil society organizations said that government tracking of religiously motivated incidents was not comprehensive or systematic.

Media reported that at a rally in Grudziadz on August 13, Wojciech Olszanski, the head of the Compatriot Companionship, a group widely described as right wing and also known as “the Comrades,” called for the killing of Jews and discrimination against them and insulted persons of Jewish descent. He accused Jews of being responsible for the difficult economic situation of Poles, stating, “A mortgage, on Jewish (...) terms, is stronger than any shackles” and, “Coal prices, fuel prices, food prices, electricity prices are Jewish plots, we can’t shoot Poles, we’ll starve them.”

On November 11 (Independence Day), the Comrades held a rally in Krakow during which one speaker spoke about burning Jews and the crowd chanted, “Down with the Jewish occupation.” The government was continuing its investigation into a 2021 Independence Day nationalist, antisemitic march in Kalisz organized by the same group in which participants chanted “Death to Jews” and burned a book symbolizing a 13th century document regulating the status of Jews and granting them special protections. On November 1, Olszanski, the main organizer of the 2021 march, began serving a six-month prison sentence after the Warsaw-Mokotow Regional Court convicted him in a separate case related to incitement to commit a crime.

On June 24, the Poznan Old Town Regional Court acquitted a man charged with public incitement to murder of a priest and 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 what he described as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender ideology. In July, prosecutors appealed the ruling to the Poznan District Court. On December 15, the Poznan District Court upheld the regional court's acquittal.

On November 9, the Bialystok Appeals Court upheld the 2021 Bialystok Regional Court conviction of two men for incitement to hatred against Jews during a march in Bialystok in 2016, but it suspended their prison sentences of 12 and six months, respectively, (meaning no jail time, provided they did not commit a similar offense during a probationary period), while increasing the compensation they had to pay the plaintiff to 1,500 zlotys (\$340) each. During the march, the men had chanted, "Zionists will hang on trees instead of leaves."

On July 22, two young men reportedly disrupted Mass at a Catholic church in Lublin, drinking alcohol, smoking, and speaking loudly and offensively. After leaving the church, they urinated on a cross outside the building. Police detained the men and charged them with malicious disruption of a religious act and offending religious sentiment.

On April 1, the spokesperson for Koszalin District Court announced that the regional court had acquitted four women indicted for maliciously disrupting religious services during protests in 2020 against the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling the same month that restricted access to abortion. The women had entered a Catholic church in the city of Koszalin during Mass, stood in front of the altar, and displayed posters proclaiming a woman's right to an abortion.

The Never Again Association reported there were several demonstrations during the year that included antisemitic content. For example, on January 5, the Comrades organized a demonstration against COVID-19 sanitary regulations in front of the parliament building. The participants chanted, "This is Poland, not Polin." (Polin means "here you will dwell" and is a common term for Poland in Hebrew, as well as the name of the museum in Warsaw that documents 1,000 years of Jewish history.)

On March 12, the Comrades organized a rally in downtown Warsaw during which several speakers made antisemitic comments. For example, Nabil al Malazi, Deputy Chair of the Polish Patriotic Party, commonly described as far right, stated that there was a plan to install a “Zionist creation” that would rule Poland and Western Ukraine. Another participant of the demonstration, former member of the Warsaw-Zoliborz District Council and leader of the group Poland Education Center Rafal Mossakowski, stated that the main instigators of the war in Ukraine were “the great Satan, i.e., the United States, and the little Satan, i.e., the State of Israel.”

On September 20, the Center for Monitoring Racism and Xenophobia, an NGO, reported that the Bialystok Prosecutor’s Office appealed against the conviction of former priest Jacek Miedlar, whom the Wroclaw-Srodmiescie Regional Court sentenced in July for public incitement to hatred against people of Jewish origin. The prosecutor’s office appealed because it had discontinued its case against Miedlar, after which two NGOs had pursued the prosecution, as permitted by law. The former priest referred to Jews as “vermin,” “Jewry,” and “Talmudic occupier” in his statements, which, according to the judge, contained strong negative overtones. The judge also said that in his statements, Miedlar insulted not only Jews and Ukrainians, but also Poles and that the terms he used were not within constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression, as they violated the legal order. The court sentenced Miedlar to one year of community work and ordered him to pay court costs of 5,500 zloty (\$1,300) and a fee of 2,180 zloty (\$500) to the state treasury.

On January 23, police detained a Dutch woman for making a Nazi salute in front of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. The local prosecutor’s office imposed a fine of an undisclosed amount, which she agreed to pay. The woman said her action was a bad joke.

According to NGOs the Never Again Association and the Open Republic Association, antisemitic narratives continued to appear on social media and online messaging platforms as well as on what were considered to be nationalist and far-right YouTube channels and other internet media websites. For example, on May 7, on *wrealu24.tv* internet television, Stanislaw Krajski, a philosopher that media such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* also described as a right-wing publicist, stated that Jews started the war in Ukraine and wanted to create a Jewish state there.

In August, YouTube removed *wRealu24.tv* from its platform. In March, the Internal Security Agency blocked *wRealu24.tv* and *wRealu24.pl* websites on the grounds that they were promoting Russian propaganda regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In February, Ordo Iuris launched a website to encourage people to report public insults against the Polish state or nation or the defamation of religious figures, including the late Pope John Paul II and the late Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński.

There were several cases of vandalism of Roman Catholic and Jewish religious sites during the year, including churches, monuments, and cemeteries. In March, for example, unknown perpetrators seriously damaged the Jewish cemetery in Legnica, registered as a historic monument. They broke into the prefuneral house, destroyed several graves, and knocked over and shattered several tombstones. Police had not identified any suspects at year's end.

On April 25, the Szczecin Regional Court sentenced a man to a one-year prison term and a fine of 2,000 zloty (\$460) for offending religious sentiment. The judgment referred to a 2021 incident in which the man painted satanic symbols on statues of the Virgin Mary at a Catholic parish in Szczecin. The verdict was subject to appeal.

In May, unknown persons destroyed 42 tombstones at the Catholic cemetery in the town of Piekary Śląskie. The perpetrators knocked over tombstones and crosses and set artificial flowers on the tombstones on fire; as a result, some crosses exhibited slight damage.

On August 25, the spokesperson for Bielsko-Biala District Court announced that the Family and Juvenile Department of Bielsko-Biala Regional Court ordered two teenagers placed in a youth educational facility and a third teenager placed under the supervision of a court guardian for vandalizing 67 tombstones at a Jewish cemetery in the town of Bielsko-Biala in 2021.

In April, the Budapest-based NGO Tom Lantos Institute issued the results of its study of antisemitic prejudice in the four Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), based on survey data collected in June 2021. According to the study, 59 percent of 1,923 survey respondents ages 18-74 in



Poland could be classified as moderately or strongly antisemitic. The study cited stereotypical statements regarding Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they fully agreed, rather agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, did not know, rather disagreed, or fully disagreed. The proportion who responded they “fully agree” or “rather agree” with the following statements were: “Jews have too much influence in Poland” (29 percent); “Jews seek to extend their influence on the global economy” (42 percent); “Jews are more inclined than others to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (27 percent); “It would be reasonable to limit the number of Jews in certain occupations” (13 percent); and “It would be best if Jews left this country” (11 percent). Conversely, the proportion who responded they “fully agree” or “rather agree” with the following statements were: “More should be taught in school about the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews so that this does not happen again” (61 percent); “We should defend the Jews of our country against the antisemites” (57 percent).

According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Warsaw-based Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) in February, 34 percent of respondents held a positive attitude towards Jews (compared with 38 percent the previous year); 27 percent expressed a negative attitude toward Jews, compared with 29 percent in 2021.

According to a public opinion survey on the Roman Catholic Church conducted by CBOS in September, 40 percent of residents had a favorable opinion of the Catholic Church, a decrease of 5 percentage points from the previous year, while 48 percent had a negative view, an increase of 7 percentage points over 2021.

The Institute for Catholic Church Statistics reported that in 2021, the most recent year for which data were available, 28 percent of respondents said they attended Sunday Mass regularly, compared with 37 percent in 2019, immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 50 percent in 1990, the latter a post-Communist high.

According to a public opinion survey conducted by CBOS in May, 37 percent of respondents attended religious services at least once a week, compared with 46 percent two years earlier.

On January 17, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 25th annual Day of Judaism, which featured a series of religious and cultural events aimed at promoting Christian-Jewish dialogue and reflecting on the links between the two religions. The main celebration took place in the city of Poznan and opened with a joint prayer by Christians and Jews led by Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich. The celebration included a biblical religious service led by Archbishop Wojciech Polak (Catholic primate in the country), with commentaries by Rabbi Schudrich and Lodz Archbishop Grzegorz Rys. Events marking the Day of Judaism took place in other towns across the country, including Lodz, Warsaw, and Wroclaw.

On January 26, the Catholic Church celebrated the 22nd annual Day of Islam, held under the motto, "Christians and Muslims are witnesses of hope," with the stated purpose of promoting peace among religious groups. Due to the pandemic, the main celebrations took place online. The program included speeches by Roman Catholic Bishop Henryk Ciereszko, Mufti Tomasz Miskiewicz, and Imam Yousef Chadid as well as a panel discussion, readings of the Bible and Quran, and joint prayers.

On January 24, a month before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, church leaders in Poland and Ukraine issued a joint appeal for dialogue and understanding and international support for the Ukrainian people. The signatories of the letter also appealed to all political leaders to refrain from hostilities. The letter was signed by Catholic Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki, the head of the Polish Bishops' Conference; Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk; Eugeniusz Popowicz, a Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishop in Poland; and Archbishop Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki, president of the Roman Catholic episcopate in Ukraine.

On February 24, Community of Conscience – Coalition for Mutual Respect issued a declaration condemning the Russian Federation for invading Ukraine, expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and calling on all government institutions, churches and religious associations, NGOs, and "all people of good will" to provide all necessary support to the citizens of Ukraine who may seek refuge in Poland in the future. The coalition, established a year earlier, included 12 representatives from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches as well as Jewish and Muslim leaders.

On April 24, the Polish Council of Christians and Jews organized a prayer march along the path of the Warsaw Ghetto monuments in commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. On October 23, 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 the NGOs Diversja Association and Lambda Warsaw continued online and in several cities and towns around the country, including Warsaw, Zgierz, Chorzow, and Bialystok. 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, including religious tolerance.

In October, the International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation announced a new initiative to provide remote, live-guided tours of Auschwitz-Birkenau to extend the reach of Holocaust education to those who did not have the means or opportunity to visit in person.

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

The U.S. Ambassador, the Consul General in Krakow, other embassy officials, and visiting U.S. Department of State representatives met with government officials from the Presidential Chancellery and the foreign affairs, culture, and justice ministries, as well as local government officials, to discuss communal and private property restitution, antisemitism, and religious antidiscrimination efforts.

The Ambassador and embassy and consulate general staff also met with members and leaders of the local Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities as well as civic society organizations to discuss issues including private and communal property restitution, concerns regarding religious intolerance and antisemitism, and the communities’ response to the refugee crisis created by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

On January 27, the Ambassador participated in the ceremony commemorating the 77th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi

concentration camp. On April 28, the Consul General in Krakow participated in the International March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau.

On July 13, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum marked the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum with a special program recognizing its unique role in preserving Holocaust memory. During the event, Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum director Piotr Cywinski received the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's National Leadership Award.

In November, the U.S. Special Adviser on Holocaust Issues and the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met separately with government officials, parliamentarians, directors of museums and research institutions, and Jewish community leaders to discuss issues including Holocaust education, research, and commemoration; private and communal property restitution; and antisemitism.

On October 18, an embassy official participated in the annual meeting of the International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation to oversee conservation efforts, to which the U.S. government donated \$2 million in 2020. The embassy official coordinated with other board members and the foundation on how the U.S. government could best support the foundation's messages combatting antisemitism and promoting religious tolerance as well as programs on Holocaust education and remembrance.

The Ambassador leveraged his social media presence to highlight the embassy's continued cooperation with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. For example, he recorded a short video in support of the museum's annual "Daffodils" social and education campaign commemorating the 79th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. 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. The embassy also amplified multiple high-level visits to the POLIN museum on social media, including a visit by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.

In November, the Ambassador visited the site of the future Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Museum and discussed Holocaust commemoration and education with the director.

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. The embassy highlighted the Ambassador's meetings with faith leaders following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and with representatives of religion-based NGOs throughout the year and delivered social media messages in support of tolerance and religious freedom.

The consulate general assisted the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with organizing the exhibit *Some Were Neighbors – Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust* in January. Together with Wladyslaw Ortyl, head of the Podkarpackie Provincial Assembly, the Consul General opened the exhibit at the Ulma Museum in Markowa in southern Poland.

The consulate general in Krakow provided a grant to the Galicia Jewish Museum to create a series of short videos depicting the life of Renia Spiegel, a Polish-Jewish girl, by using her diary from World War II. The project aims to spread greater awareness of the Holocaust among youth and spark discussion about antisemitism and religious intolerance.

In June, staff from the consulate general in Krakow again participated in the Krakow Jewish Community Center's Virtual Ride for the Living, 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 countering Holocaust distortion and denial.

In July and August, the consulate general in Krakow continued to fund annual workshops on teaching the Holocaust in context that were led by staff of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow. The courses 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 June, the embassy supported the Zachor Jewish Cultural Festival in Bialystok with a grant to finance a klezmer concert. The concert encouraged religious tolerance, especially among youth, by promoting knowledge of Jewish culture, specifically Jewish musical traditions.

In November, the embassy supported the POLIN museum's annual conference for educators, which focused on diversity and the representation of minority groups, including religious groups, in education. The embassy brought its English-language fellows to lead workshops for teachers, and an embassy representative spoke at the conference's opening.