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2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Poland



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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 Czeszochowa Regional Court convicted two women of offending religious sentiment for carrying a picture of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo during an LGBTQI+ march in 2021, fining one and sentencing the other to five months of community service. The government rejected the registration applications of four religious groups and discontinued, refused to initiate, or upheld a prior rejection of applications of five others. One group appealed to the Warsaw Administrative Court. The religious community property commission resolved 36 religious communal property restitution cases – including 25 by the Jewish community – of 2,774 cases outstanding. There were reports of antisemitic and anti-Muslim statements or other acts by politicians from several political parties. A Confederation Party member of parliament used a fire extinguisher to put out menorah candles during a Hanukkah celebration in the parliament foyer, an act that numerous politicians and officials, including Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Speaker of the lower house of parliament Szymon Holownia,

denounced as antisemitic. Senior government officials participated in Holocaust remembrance events and publicly denounced antisemitism.

According to the most recent statistics, prosecutors investigated 418 religiously motivated incidents in 2022 – 292 antisemitic, 61 anti-Muslim, and 65 anti-Roman Catholic – compared with 477 in 2021. Incidents during 2023 included two assaults of Catholic priests, antisemitic demonstrations, hate speech online, and vandalism of Catholic and Jewish sites. The Catholic Church again celebrated Jewish and Muslim days with Jewish and Muslim counterparts.

The U.S. Ambassador, other embassy and Krakow consulate general staff, and visiting U.S. officials discussed countering antisemitism and other religious discrimination and private property and communal religious property restitution with government officials. In January, the Second Gentleman of the United States, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ambassador at large for International Religious Freedom, and the Ambassador participated in the commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi German concentration camp. In April, the Ambassador, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Human Rights Council, and Chair of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad participated in commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In November, the Secretary of Transportation visited sites of historic significance to Krakow's Jewish community and reiterated U.S. commitment to combating antisemitism. The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general staff met with religious leaders to discuss private and communal religious property restitution, Holocaust remembrance and education, countering intolerance and antisemitism, and their response to the refugee inflow from Ukraine. The embassy and consulate general 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 39.1 million (midyear 2023). The 2023 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 117,000

members. Polish Orthodox Church representatives were unable to estimate the total number of Orthodox worshippers in the country, which, according to the United Nations, increased as a result of approximately 955,000 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 shall be determined 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 insult of religious feelings of others “by publicly insulting an object of religious worship or a place intended for the public performance of religious rites” as an offense to religious sentiment. The penalties range from a fine, typically 5,000 zloty (\$1,300), 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 publicly insulting 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. In addition, the law requires that all broadcasts “respect the religious feelings of the audiences and, in particular, respect the Christian system of values.”

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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), fined, and 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 170 registered religious groups and five aggregate religious organizations (the Polish Ecumenical Council, Polish Buddhist Union, Biblical Society, Evangelical Alliance, and Council of Protestant Churches) 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 (MIA) 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 an 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), that 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 regarding 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 file another application with the ministry or 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. In addition to having the right to own property and open bank accounts, the 190 registered and statutorily recognized religious groups and organizations receive other privileges not available to unregistered groups, such as the right to teach religion in schools and selective tax benefits, including exemptions from import tariffs and property and income taxes on their

educational, scientific, cultural, and legal activities. 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 2021 law 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 commissioner for human rights 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 commissioner 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

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

According to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, certain defamation and public insult cases, especially with respect to offending religious sentiment, posed a risk of limiting freedom of expression and stifling free public debate.

On April 23, the Czestochowa Regional Court found two women guilty of offending religious sentiment for carrying a picture of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo during an equality (LGBTQI+ pride) march in Czestochowa in 2021. The court sentenced one woman to five months of community service and fined the other 2,000 zloty (\$510). The two women appealed the judgment, and the case was pending at year's end.

On September 21, the Supreme Court struck down the Poznan District Court's decision to uphold the acquittal of a man charged with public incitement to murder of a priest and to hatred on the grounds of religious differences, and insulting followers of the Catholic Church. The Supreme Court returned the case to the district court for a new trial. 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.

On November 21, the Poznan Appeals Court overturned a March decision by the Poznan District Court that acquitted 32 persons charged with malicious disruption of a religious service and remanded the case to the district court for another trial. The case referred to a 2020 protest against antiabortion legislation, in which the 32 persons entered the Poznan Catholic Cathedral and disrupted the Sunday Mass.

Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others

Citing various deficiencies in the applications, the MIA denied the registration of four religious groups during the year: the Church of the Risen (applied in 2020), the Shekinah Christian Church (applied in 2021), Vedic Society Religious Union (applied in 2021), and the "Wisdom of Nature" Church (applied in 2022). In addition, ruling the applicants did not meet the criteria for registering as a religious group, the MIA discontinued the administrative proceedings to register the Kriya Yoga Spiritual Path (applied in 2019), "Tsechen Menri Ling" organization (applied in 2021), and Church of People of the Sun (applied in 2021) and refused to initiate the registration procedure for the Polish Union of Early Buddhism (applied in 2022). During the year, the MIA removed the Hatha Yoga Union "Gate to Yoga" group from the registry at the request of the group.

In January, the MIA upheld its earlier decision to discontinue the registration procedure of the Self-Family group (also known as Friendship Family, which applied in 2020). In March, the group filed an appeal with the Warsaw Administrative Court. On April 6, the MIA sent a response to the court, requesting that it dismiss the complaint. At year's end, the court had not ruled on the case.

According to MIA statistics, between January 1 and late October (October 25 for the Orthodox Church and October 23 for other religious groups), the religious community property commissions resolved 36 communal property claims out of approximately 2,774 pending claims by religious groups. (The government did not issue figures covering the same period in 2022, but between January 1 of that year and dates ranging between August and November, depending on the religious group, it resolved 100 claims by religious groups.) Of the 36 resolved claims, 25 were by the Jewish community, six by the Orthodox Church, three by the Lutheran Church, and two by unidentified members of the "all other denominations" group.

As of late October, the commissions had cumulatively resolved, either partially or entirely, 3,013 of the 5,504 claims by the Jewish community that the commission deemed valid; 996 of 1,182 claims by the Lutheran Church; 385 of 472 claims by the Orthodox Church; and 97 of 170 claims by all other denominations.

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.

Legal experts expressed concern that the law authorizing Warsaw authorities to resolve expeditiously longstanding restitution cases affecting properties being used for public purposes continued to limit 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. Authorities enacted the law with the stated aim of ending abusive practices in the trading of property owners' claims by specialized law firms.

In November, Warsaw city authorities stated that since the 2015 law had entered into force, the city had resolved approximately 940 dormant claims filed before 1950, an increase of 294 in the total of resolved claims since the previous year. These included the rejection of a total of 433 restitution claims against public properties since 2015, an increase of 132 since 2022. 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 after the transition to democracy. 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.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Media and NGOs, such as the Never Again Association and the Open Republic Association, reported instances of antisemitic and anti-Muslim statements made by parliamentarians, party leaders, and electoral candidates from the Law and Justice (PiS, the ruling party at the time), Confederation, and Kukiz'15 Parties. The Never Again Association published a report on hate speech used during the parliamentary election campaign in October and documented anti-Muslim, as well as antisemitic, speech throughout the year. The Open Republic

Association monitored public media for hate speech during the electoral campaign and reported it observed significantly fewer antisemitic comments compared with previous campaigns.

The Never Again Association reported that in July, a then member of parliament from the Confederation Party, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, suggested on X (formerly Twitter) that dark-skinned Muslims were responsible for criminal acts on the streets in France and that violence against them would be acceptable. Korwin-Mikke wrote, "I don't understand the French problem with immigrants? We should hand out guns to white heterosexual French people – and pass an amnesty and a bonus for anyone who shoots a bandit, robber, thief, or rapist in the act. And announce it in Arabic, too."

In July, Robert Bakiewicz, former head of the Independence March Association, a group considered to be antisemitic by the Never Again Association, and a PiS Party candidate, appeared on the National Media channel broadcast on Facebook and called then opposition candidates "implementers of certain actions that are beneficial to the Federal Republic of Germany and also to various Jewish organizations that are currently looking for another scapegoat [scapegoat] – to pay, to pay some reparations for the Second World War." The Never Again Association called Bakiewicz's statements antisemitic, and Facebook subsequently removed them from the platform.

On May 10, during a meeting organized by the Confederation Party, professor at the Lublin Catholic University and Confederation candidate for parliament Ryszard Zajaczkowski said, "We face the greatest totalitarianism in history, compared to which the Auschwitz camp could be called a recreation camp." On July 11, during another public meeting, Zajaczkowski said that, in addition to the German and Russian atrocities perpetrated during World War II and shortly after, Poles had also been victims of "the Jewish genocide," which he said referred "to the actions of the Jews who got involved, especially after the war, but also during the war, for example in the Soviet apparatus of oppression, in the NKVD [former Soviet secret police], and then in the Security Service." On July 14, the Lublin Catholic University initiated disciplinary proceedings against Zajaczkowski. At year's end, there was no information available as to the result of those proceedings.

Cochairman of the Confederation Party Krzysztof Bosak denied the idea of the existence of "Islamophobia" in a radio interview on August 29. He said the term "exists so that we don't argue with some of the ideas of sharia."

According to media reports, some politicians sought to restrict academic freedom by threatening funding and stifling accurate discussion of the Holocaust. For example, in April, senior government officials criticized Barbara Engelking, a well-known Holocaust historian, who said in a television interview that modern Poles falsify history by exaggerating the amount of help Poles provided to Jews during World War II. Then Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki wrote on social media those were “scandalous words,” adding they had nothing to do with reliable historical knowledge. Then Education and Science Minister Przemyslaw Czarnek threatened to cut funding for the Polish Center of Holocaust Research of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, which Engelking headed. Media reported some civil society observers, museums, scientists, and historians, such as the Open Republic Association, Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and Jewish Historical Institute Association, made public statements in support of Engelking and described the government’s reaction as a form of persecution.

Media reported that on May 30, Grzegorz Braun, a Confederation Party member of parliament, interrupted Polish-Canadian historian Jan Grabowski’s Holocaust lecture at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. Braun got up from his chair, took a microphone from its stand, and smashed it against the lectern. Grabowski’s lecture was entitled, “Poland’s (growing) problem with Holocaust history.” Braun refused to leave the building when police arrived. In a June 1 statement, Yad Vashem Chair Dani Dayan remarked, “This incident represents a new low in attempts to stifle discussion about the complicity of Poles in the persecution and murder of their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust. This act of vandalism ... is an attack on academic freedom, on the historical record, and on Holocaust remembrance.”

On December 12, Braun used a fire extinguisher to put out Hanukkah candles during a Hanukkah celebration in the foyer of the parliament building, an incident widely denounced as antisemitic by a broad spectrum of political leadership. Parliament Speaker Szymon Holownia called Braun’s actions “absolutely scandalous,” and parliament levied the highest possible fine on him. Prime Minister Tusk called Braun’s behavior “a disgrace” and said it could not be repeated. Catholic Cardinal Grzegorz Rys, Archbishop of Lodz and the chair of the Polish Bishops’ Conference for Dialogue with Judaism, declared, “I am ashamed and apologize to the entire Jewish community in Poland.” Slawomir Mentzen, one of the leaders of the Confederation Party, issued a statement saying, “I condemn the act of Grzegorz Braun.” Prosecutors opened an investigation into the incident on December 13.

On September 11, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage gave an award to writer and publicist Rafal Ziemkiewicz, who in the past, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, made antisemitic comments on social media, in his books, and in video recordings. For example, the center stated that in 2021, Ziemkiewicz said in an internet video that the victims in a mass killing of Jews by their neighbors in Jedwabne in 1941 deserved their fate. In a September 20 statement, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's director of Eastern European Affairs, Efraim Zuroff, criticized the award as a "vicious insult to the victims of the Holocaust and the survivors, as well as to Jews the world over."

In February, media reported the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage's Patriotic Fund awarded three million zloty (\$765,000) in grants to two organizations that human rights groups called antisemitic: the Independence March Association and the Independence March Units.

A police official reported that efforts under an action plan to combat hate crimes and hate speech allowed police to effectively respond to an antisemitic incident at a march in Warsaw in October and cooperate with prosecutors on the case. In 2022, the National Police approved the action plan for 2022-25 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. The National Police also used the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe legal definition of hate crimes in their work.

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 March 3, the Torun Regional Court decided to discontinue the case against then opposition Member of Parliament Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, who was charged with "malicious disruption of a religious service" and offending religious sentiment in 2022. On April 17, the Torun District Court upheld this decision. 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 expressed support for 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, then Prime Minister

Morawiecki, and then Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau posted messages on social media commemorating Holocaust victims and emphasized the importance of continued Holocaust remembrance. Secretary of State in the Presidential Chancellery Wojciech Kolarski and then Deputy Senate Speaker Michal Kaminski participated in a commemoration ceremony at the site of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

In March, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Glinski attended a conference in Brussels to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. He said there should be no room for antisemitism in Poland, noting there were approximately 150 antisemitic incidents recorded in Poland per year. He said these often took the form of vandalism and elicited condemnation from the government and the public, adding that antisemitism should be fought in all its forms.

On April 18, then Prime Minister Morawiecki paid tribute to thousands of Warsaw Ghetto Jews killed by Nazi Germans during WWII. In a letter to the participants in a related ceremony, Morawiecki wrote, "The tragic chapter of our heritage is our common fate during the war, which is clearly symbolized by the Monument to the Common Martyrdom of Jews and Poles in Warsaw." He added, "Together with you I bow my head and pay tribute to those murdered."

On April 19, President Duda participated in the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. During his speech, he referred to the Jewish insurgents as a "symbol of bravery, determination and courage, our heroes, who fought for a free Poland." President Duda also said, "Today we bow our heads low before the heroes of the Ghetto Uprising, those who fought against hatred and Nazism for their freedom and dignity, Polish Jews, Polish citizens, who never gave up, never lost their spirit, who are a great example for all of us to this day." The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage also organized a commemorative concert.

On July 21, Secretary of State in the Presidential Chancellery Kolarski and Civic Coalition Member of Parliament Michal Szczerba participated in the march to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the deportation of Polish Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka death camp.

On November 16, then Deputy Minister of Culture Jaroslaw Sellin attended the commemoration of the 83rd anniversary of the construction of the Warsaw Ghetto wall. He stated the fragment of the wall is a symbol of antisemitism, which took the form of anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism, and that "standing by such a wall, we must agree to oppose these forms of modern antisemitism."

On January 25, President Duda hosted a New Year's meeting for representatives of various churches, religious groups, and national and ethnic minorities. He expressed appreciation for assistance religious groups provided to war refugees from Ukraine and thanked attendees for participating in the event, stating that such meetings built the strength of the state and the community. President Duda asked that participants "look at each other with kindness, with understanding, that we look for paths that lead us to understanding, to resolving questionable, sometimes contentious issues – as in life."

On June 30, the Warsaw District Court registered the Comrades as a new political party. The party was led by Wojciech Olszanski, one of the main organizers of several antisemitic rallies across the country, and the group was widely considered by NGOs such as the Never Again Association and the Open Republic Association as antisemitic.

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 2022, the most recent period for which data were available, prosecutors investigated 418 religiously motivated incidents, compared with 477 in 2021. The report cited investigations into 292 antisemitic, 61 anti-Muslim, and 65 anti-Roman Catholic incidents. Information on the number of investigations that resulted in prosecutions or convictions was unavailable. Civil society organizations said government tracking of religiously motivated incidents was not comprehensive or systematic.

During the year, media reported at least two incidents of physical attacks against Catholic priests. On May 28, a man assaulted a Catholic priest when the latter was walking back from a church after Sunday Mass in the city of Wroclaw. The perpetrator hit the priest in the head, broke his glasses, and verbally abused him. "He jerked me around, ripped my collar off.... It seems to me that he was most bothered by this cassock and that is why he attacked me," the priest said. Passersby helped to drag the alleged perpetrator away and called police.

There were reports of pro-Palestinian demonstrations that included antisemitic messages following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack against Israel. For example, on October 21, at a pro-Palestinian march in Warsaw, a Norwegian student at Warsaw Medical University carried a banner with a picture of a Star of David in a trash can that read, "Keep the world clean." Another poster said, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," implying the destruction

of the State of Israel. On October 22, President Duda stated, "We Poles, due to the memory of those murdered during the Holocaust, can never tolerate any manifestations of antisemitism in any form whatsoever, and any sign of it arouses our deep indignation." Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski also condemned the incident on X. On October 30, the president of Warsaw Medical University announced the university suspended the student. In December, media reported the student apologized for the incident and returned to school.

In April, the Ostrowiec Wielkopolski Office of the District Prosecutor announced it had finalized an investigation and indicted five men charged with organizing antisemitic marches and incitement to hatred on the grounds of national identity. The indictment referred to a 2021 march in Kalisz, during which the organizers burned a copy of the Kalisz Statute – a famous historical document from the 13th century that gave Jews various privileges. Some participants chanted "Death to Jews" during the march. The indicted men pleaded not guilty. If convicted, they could face up to an eight-year prison term. Prosecutors from other cities joined the investigation, and as a result, the primary defendant, Wojciech Olszanski, was charged with committing six similar offenses in other cities and in speeches he posted on the internet. None of these trials had begun by year's end. Olszanski was released from prison in April after serving a six-month sentence for his conviction in a separate case.

On February 2, the Wroclaw District Court upheld the 2022 conviction and sentence of community service of former priest Jacek Miedlar by the Wroclaw-Srodmiestec Regional Court for public incitement to hatred against persons of Jewish origin after he called Jews "vermin," "Jewry," and "Talmudic occupier." The prosecutor's office had appealed the lower court's conviction.

In February, the Poznan Regional Court sentenced then Catholic priest Michael Woznicki to 30 hours of community service per month for six months after convicting him of insulting Jews and inciting hatred against them during an online sermon in 2021. Woznicki appealed the verdict, but in June, the Poznan District Court upheld the conviction. Woznicki said in his sermon that Jews "assumed the role of a leech ... leading the host's body to death" and that Jews were in league with the devil. According to the Open Republic Association, Woznicki, whom the Catholic Church expelled from the priesthood in December, had delivered other hateful sermons. Chief Rabbi Schudrich stated, "The Polish court has handed down a clear verdict that antisemitic hate speech is illegal in Poland."

According to the Never Again Association and the Open Republic Association, antisemitic narratives continued to appear on social media and online messaging platforms, including X and YouTube, as well as on nationalist and far-right internet media websites.

In March, the weekly magazine *Do Rzeczy* promoted on social media an interview with Stanislaw Michalkiewicz, a publicist who had made antisemitic comments in the past, in which Michalkiewicz called a documentary critical of Pope and Saint John Paul II “a campaign that has been unleashed in Poland by two centers. The first is the Judenrat of *Gazeta Wyborcza* [a daily newspaper], and the second center is TVN [a private television channel], which is Jewish television for Poles.” *Do Rzeczy* quickly removed the quote from its social media account and from the interview. It also omitted the quote when it published the full interview.

There were several cases of vandalism of Roman Catholic and Jewish religious sites during the year, including churches, monuments, and cemeteries.

In February, police detained a man who vandalized a Catholic church in the town of Kozięglowy near Poznan. The man was charged with offending religious feelings, destruction of property, and theft. The man knocked over religious statues, placed a statue of Jesus in the baptismal font, knocked over candles, and destroyed religious paintings and stained-glass windows. If convicted, he could face up to a five-year prison term. There was no information on the status of his case at year’s end.

On March 12, two teenagers, ages 14 and 15 and identified through surveillance video, put up a sign with a swastika and the letters KKK on the wall of a synagogue in Gdansk. Due to their age, their case was assigned to the family and juvenile division of the local court. The chair of the Gdansk Jewish community said the incident was “an incitement to hatred and aggression” and thanked police for their quick response.

In April, a man vandalized a statue of St. John Paul II in front of the Lodz Cathedral by covering it with paint. Police detained a suspect on charges of offending religious feelings, a charge that carries a potential sentence of up to two years in prison, and vandalizing (insulting) a monument, a charge that carries a potential punishment of community service.

In June, four men vandalized 26 tombstones at the 150-year-old Jewish cemetery in Zabrze. Police detained two suspects, and prosecutors charged them with desecrating a burial site and destroying historical monuments. In July, the National Institute for Monument Preservation allocated 50,000 zloty (\$13,000) for the renovation of the vandalized tombstones.

In May, the U.S.-based NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued the results of its survey of antisemitic prejudice in Poland, based on data collected in November and December 2022. The survey asked approximately 500 respondents whether 11 stereotypical statements about Jews were “probably true.” Based on responses, the ADL estimated 35 percent of all

individuals over 18 in Poland agreed that six or more statements were “probably true,” compared with 48 percent in 2019 and 37 percent in 2015. Among the statements were: “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Poland” (62 percent); “Jews have too much power in international financial markets” (53 percent); “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust” (57 percent); “Jews don’t care about what happens to anyone but their own kind” (36 percent); “Jews have too much control over the global media” (27 percent); and “Jews are responsible for most of the world’s wars” (10 percent).

According to a public opinion survey on the Roman Catholic Church conducted by CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) in September, 46 percent of residents had a favorable opinion of the Catholic Church and 42 percent had a negative view, compared with a 40-percent favorable view and a 48-percent unfavorable view in 2022.

On January 17, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 26th 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 Siedlce and included multiple joint prayer services and a conference. Chief Rabbi of Poland Schudrich and Israeli Rabbi Boaz Pash, as well as Catholic Bishop of Siedlce Kazimierz Gurda and Archbishop of Lodz Grzegorz Rys, attended the celebrations. Events marking the Day of Judaism also took place in other towns across the country.

On January 26, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 23rd annual Day of Islam, held under the motto, “Christians and Muslims – sharing joys and sorrows.” The main celebrations took place in Warsaw. The program included readings from the Bible and Quran, joint prayers, and a discussion of the two religions. Catholic bishop Henryk Ciereszko, the chair of the Episcopate’s Committee for Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions, and Mufti Tomasz Miskiewicz, head of the Muslim Religious Union, participated in the event.

On April 23, 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 8, the council organized a joint Catholic and Jewish prayer to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah.

The NGO Diversja Association and Credit Bank Agricole Poland implemented the final year of Human Library projects, a two-year program funded by the European Union, in several cities and towns around the country, including Warsaw, Lodz, Katowice, Chorzow, and Dzialdowo. The projects involved a diverse group of volunteers, including representatives of different religious groups and persons with no religion, 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.

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, Muslim, and Jehovah's Witness communities as well as local and international civil society organizations to discuss issues including private and communal property restitution, concerns regarding religious intolerance and antisemitism, and the communities' continued response to the refugee crisis created by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

During his January 26-29 visit, the Second Gentleman of the United States underscored the U.S. government's commitment to combating antisemitism and promoting Holocaust education and remembrance. Throughout his engagements, he discussed best practices on fighting antisemitism and intolerance with civil society and religious and academic leaders. On January 27, the Second Gentleman, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and the Ambassador participated in the ceremony commemorating the 78th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp. The following day, the Second Gentleman and the Ambassador hosted a roundtable on combating antisemitism, during which they emphasized the importance of accurate Holocaust commemoration, education, and interfaith efforts to combat antisemitism.

The U.S. Secretary of Transportation, accompanied by a senior embassy official and the Consul General in Krakow, visited sites of historic significance to Krakow's Jewish heritage in the Kazimierz neighborhood on November 7. The Secretary of Transportation laid a wreath at the city's Holocaust memorial on behalf of the American people. He also met Jewish community leaders and discussed the work of Krakow's Jewish community to support

Ukrainian refugees and combat antisemitism. He reiterated the U.S. government's commitment to combat antisemitism and hatred of all kinds.

On August 16, the Secretary of State delivered video remarks at the ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the Bialystok Ghetto Uprising that included an announcement of a one-million-dollar donation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation for live virtual tours of Auschwitz-Birkenau, increasing access to Holocaust education for persons around the world. The Secretary told the story of his Jewish stepfather's survival and lifetime commitment to ensuring "never again" is more than just a slogan. The Ambassador also spoke at the commemoration and highlighted the U.S. government's commitment to countering antisemitism and supporting Holocaust commemoration.

On April 19, the Ambassador, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Human Rights Council, and Chair of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad participated in a ceremony and other commemorative events marking the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which included the participation of the Presidents of Poland, Germany, and Israel. The U.S. government delegation met with civil society and Jewish community leaders on the margins of the official ceremony to discuss combating antisemitism and promoting accurate Holocaust education and commemoration. In addition, the delegation recorded a short video in support of the annual "Daffodils" education campaign of the POLIN Museum commemorating the uprising. The program aims to educate the public by handing out thousands of paper daffodils on Warsaw streets in remembrance of the Jews who fought and died in the uprising.

On October 4, the Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism celebrated Sukkot with the Warsaw Jewish Community and the Chief Rabbi of Poland. The Deputy Special Envoy discussed U.S. government measures to combat antisemitism and the Jewish community's efforts to facilitate the reporting of antisemitic hate crimes.

On October 12, the Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice met with the Never Again Association to express U.S. government support for steps to counter hate and extremism globally, including antisemitism.

On April 18, the Consul General in Krakow participated in the International March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau in support of religious freedom and tolerance.

On April 26, the Ambassador hosted a delegation of staff from and supporters of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for a dinner and discussion with museums, NGOs, and the

Jewish community on issues of interest and concern for Jewish community in Poland and areas of cooperation between the U.S. museum and stakeholders in Poland, such as museums, NGOs, and the government.

On July 9, a senior embassy official spoke at a luncheon honoring the heroism of Polish Righteous Among the Nations who saved Jews during the Holocaust and Nazi Germany's occupation of Poland. Sponsored by the New York-based Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, the event at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw honored the estimated 61 Righteous individuals living in Poland. The senior official quoted the U.S. President, saying, "Let us join hands across faiths, races, and backgrounds to make clear that evil will not win, hate will not prevail, and antisemitism will not be the story of our time."

On June 5, the Consul General in Krakow hosted a reception in honor of cadets and midshipmen participating in the American Service Academy program, a weeklong training in Krakow and Warsaw allowing students of the U.S. Naval Academy, Air Force Academy, Coast Guard Academy, and Military Academy at West Point to explore issues of religious tolerance and Holocaust awareness. Reception guests included active-duty Polish military officers, Polish military cadets and their instructors, leaders of Jewish cultural organizations and NGOs promoting Holocaust education, and staff of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. In her remarks, the Consul General emphasized the U.S. commitment to ensuring that future military leaders respect human rights and accurately understand the history of the Holocaust.

On June 30, the Ambassador, Consul General in Krakow, and embassy and consulate general staff members participated in the Ride for the Living, starting at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. The Ambassador provided opening remarks during a ceremony honoring Holocaust victims and survivors and emphasized the U.S. commitment to "never again" and discussed the importance of revitalizing Jewish life and culture in Krakow. The event included a 60-mile bicycle ride (the distance between Auschwitz-Birkenau and Krakow), tracing a Holocaust survivor's initial journey on foot, to symbolize the Jewish community's journey from surviving to currently building a better future in Krakow. The Ambassador also met with Jewish leaders and survivors, highlighting the U.S. government's commitment to combating antisemitism and the importance of accurate Holocaust remembrance.

In September, the Consul General in Krakow hosted a roundtable with Jewish community leaders to discuss how the U.S. government could support efforts to combat antisemitism through museum education programs.

On October 25, the Ambassador, a representative from the Department of State, and an embassy official participated in the annual meeting of the International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation to oversee conservation efforts. The Ambassador gave remarks highlighting the U.S. government's one-million-dollar contribution to the foundation for live virtual tours and underscored the U.S. government's commitment to innovation and educational partnership in increasing awareness and access to Holocaust education and remembrance. The U.S. officials coordinated with other board members and the foundation on how the U.S. government could best support the foundation's messages combating antisemitism and promoting religious tolerance as well as programs on Holocaust education and remembrance.

On October 27, the Ambassador attended an interfaith prayer for peace in Warsaw organized by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews and the Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims. Chief Rabbi of Poland Schudrich, clergy of various Christian churches, and Secretary of State in the Presidential Chancellery Kolarski also participated.

On October 9, the Ambassador joined a prayer service to honor the victims of Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel at the Nozyk Synagogue in Warsaw. On October 13, a senior embassy official took part in a public interfaith prayer for peace organized by Chief Rabbi of Poland Schudrich.

On November 19, a senior embassy official joined other members of the diplomatic community and attended a march in Warsaw against antisemitism and for the freedom of hostages held in Gaza.

On December 8, the Ambassador lit a Hanukkah candle at a Warsaw Jewish school and expressed the U.S. government's commitment to religious tolerance and acceptance. The Ambassador attended a Hanukkah candle lighting at the Israeli Ambassador's residence on December 12, at which he underscored the U.S. government's commitment to combating antisemitism. Both messages were shared on the Ambassador's social media accounts after the events.

Throughout the year, the Ambassador, 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 civil society and faith leaders following Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel and a global rise in antisemitism. The embassy and consulate general delivered social media

messages in support of tolerance and religious freedom and against antisemitism in all forms, and, using social media, directly condemned incidents of antisemitism, such as the December incident in parliament in which a parliamentarian disrupted a Hanukkah celebration.

The embassy and consulate 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.

As part of its ongoing cooperative agreement with the POLIN Museum, the embassy, together with the museum, continued to organize study visits of Polish teachers and educators to learn about Holocaust and human rights education in the United States. During the year, eight teachers participated in the program.

U.S. embassy officials closely coordinated with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on its traveling exhibition, *Some Were Neighbors – Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust*, which continued to tour multiple cities throughout Poland. U.S. embassy officials shared information on the exhibit with NGOs and educators and attended some of the exhibition openings and closings throughout the country.

In the fall, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow issued an eight-part series of short videos on the life of a Jewish girl, Renia Spiegel, based on her diary from World War II. In 2022, the embassy provided a multiyear grant to the museum to create the videos. In November, the consulate general hosted a teacher's training symposium on using the videos in high schools. The project aimed to spread greater awareness of the Holocaust among youth and spark discussion about antisemitism and religious intolerance.

With support from a U.S. embassy grant, a local foundation organized concerts in Lodz, Warsaw, Szczecin, and Wroclaw recalling synagogue music from the anthology of Gershon Ephros, a cantor and composer who lived in Poland, Palestine, and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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. 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 addition, the consulate general funded continuing activities for the

alumni of the Academy of Antidiscrimination Education with the Auschwitz Jewish Center, a teacher training program that promotes both Holocaust and human rights education in schools.

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