

# HUNGARY 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The Fundamental Law (constitution) provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to choose, change, or manifest religion or belief, cites “the role of Christianity” in “preserving nationhood,” and values “various religious traditions.” It prohibits religious discrimination and speech violating the dignity of any religious community and stipulates the autonomy of religious communities. On April 15, an amendment to the law that had deprived hundreds of religious entities of their legal status entered into force, establishing a four-tier system of categorizing religious groups, all of which will be eligible to receive state funding and member donations from income tax beginning in 2020. Under the amendment, parliament retains its discretionary role in the registration of incorporated (i.e., established) churches (“church” applies to any religious group, not just Christian), the highest category, while the Budapest-Capital Regional Court rules on eligibility for registration under one of the other three categories. The Jewish group the government appointed in 2018 to work on the House of Fates Holocaust museum proposed a new outline for it in June and said the museum should open within 18 months. Domestic and international groups continued to raise concerns about the project, which the government had placed on hold since 2014 after the groups said it could obscure the country’s role in the Holocaust. Other Jewish groups expressed concern about government officials’ praise for the country’s World War II (WWII)-era leaders and Hitler allies and about public messaging these groups said could incite anti-Semitism. Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orbán stated the government provided protection and major support to the country’s Jewish community. Senior government officials continued to make statements defending the country and Europe as Christian and describing the threat of a “Muslim immigration invasion.”

There were reports of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents, including verbal insults, hate speech, vandalism, and graffiti. Muslim leaders said anti-Muslim incidents decreased compared with 2018, but discrimination continued. Significant percentages of society held anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim views, according to independent polls.

U.S. embassy and visiting U.S. government officials met with the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) to discuss religious freedom, anti-Semitism, Holocaust commemoration, the amendment to the religion law, and heirless property restitution for victims of the Holocaust. The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and

Combat Anti-Semitism visited the country in May and discussed religious freedom issues with high-level government and religious leaders. The Deputy Administrator for USAID and the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council discussed the importance of religious freedom in formal remarks at a Thanksgiving dinner the embassy cohosted with the government, which religious leaders of many faiths attended. Embassy officials discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom with a range of religious leaders and civil society representatives.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.8 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2011 national census, which included an optional question on religious affiliation, of the 73 percent of the population that responded, 51 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 16 percent as Hungarian Reformed Church (Calvinist), 3 percent as Lutheran, 2 percent as Greek Catholic, and less than 1 percent as Jewish; 23 percent reported no religious affiliation, and 2 percent said they were atheists. Other religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), the Church of Scientology (COS), Russian and other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, Muslims, and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness. The Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood (MET) has approximately 8,500 members, according to a 2013 news report, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church approximately 9,300 members, according to the 2011 census. The World Jewish Congress estimates the Jewish population to be between 35,000 and 120,000 persons. Local Jewish organizations estimate approximately 100,000 citizens with Jewish heritage live in the country, primarily in Budapest. Other religious groups are distributed throughout the country.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The Fundamental Law, the country's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience and religion, including freedom to choose or change religion or belief, and freedom – alone or in community with others and in public or in private – to manifest religion or belief through religious acts or ceremonies, or in any other way, in worshipping, practice, and observance. It prohibits religious

discrimination, as well as speech “aimed at violating the dignity” of any religious community.

The constitution’s preamble states, “We recognize the role of Christianity” in preserving the nation and “value the various religious traditions” in the country. The constitution stipulates separation between religious communities and the state, as well as the autonomy of religious groups. According to the constitution, the state may, at the request of religious communities, cooperate with them on community goals.

On April 15, a 2018 parliamentary amendment to the 2011 religion law entered into force. The amended law replaces the previous two-tier system of “incorporated churches” and “religious organizations” with a four-tier system of, in descending order, “established (or incorporated) churches,” “registered churches” (also called “registered II”), “listed churches” (also called “registered I”), and “religious associations.” The term “church” in the law refers to any religious community, not just Christian ones, and religious groups in any category may use “church” in their official names. All previously incorporated religious groups retain their status in the first tier of the new system as established churches. Recognition as an established church continues to require a two-thirds approval by parliament; the Budapest-Capital Regional Court has jurisdiction to rule on applications for registration within the other three categories. Religious groups in all four tiers have “legal personality,” which grants them legal rights, such as the right to own property.

Religious entities that do not apply for legal status in one of the four categories are still able to function and conduct worship. The amended law states constitutional protection of freedom of religion also applies to these unregistered groups.

To qualify for established church status, a religious group must first have registered status and then conclude a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the state for the purpose of accomplishing community goals. The government submits the comprehensive agreement to parliament, which must approve it by a two-thirds majority vote. A registered church becomes an established church from the day parliament approves the comprehensive agreement. Established churches are eligible to benefit from significant state subsidies.

To qualify for registered status, a religious group must receive tax donations from an average of 4,000 persons per year in the five-year period prior to the application. This status also requires that the group either has operated as a

religious association for at least 20 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally, or has operated as a listed church for at least 15 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for listed status, a religious group must receive tax donations from an average of 1,000 persons per year in the three-year period prior to the application for status and have operated as a religious association for at least five years in the country or for at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for religious association status, a religious group must have at least 10 members.

The amended law allows the government to negotiate individual cooperation agreements with all four categories of religious communities for the performance of social service activities and support of faith-based activities, specified in these agreements. The agreements' duration depends on the status of the religious community, ranging from a five-year maximum for religious associations up to 10 and 15 years for listed and registered churches, respectively, and unlimited duration for established churches. All religious groups other than religious associations must publish these agreements and publicly account for social service spending.

Churches that agree not to seek state or European Union (EU) funding (including personal income tax donations) for their religious activities may qualify as registered or listed churches without fulfilling the requirement regarding the number of personal income tax donations. The applicant religious community must perform primarily religious activities and may not be a criminal defendant or have been convicted of a crime during the previous five years, under sanction for "repeated violation of accounting and management rules," or considered a national security threat. The court decides whether to grant status as a registered or listed church based on an examination of the criteria above. In reviewing these applications, the court may consult church law, church history, or ecclesiastical or academic experts, and may also consult the national security services.

Religious groups that agree not to seek government or EU funding but accept financial support at a later stage must report this to the court within 15 days of the disbursement of the aid. To avoid losing its status or a reclassification to the lower association tier, the religious group has eight days to declare to the court that it has returned the funds, requested cancellation of its religious registration status, or complied with the individual tax donation requirement to become a registered or

listed organization. The religious group or prosecutor's office may appeal the court's decision on the status of the group to the Budapest-Capital Court of Appeal.

The law stipulates the relevant government minister, based on information received from the court, shall manage an electronic database of religious communities with legal status, accessible to the public free of charge. At year's end, the database was not publicly accessible.

The amended law allows taxpayers to donate 1 percent of their income taxes to any religious community in any of the four categories starting with the 2020 tax year. Religious groups may use these funds as they wish. Only established and registered churches (the two highest tiers) are eligible to receive a state subsidy matching the 1 percent tax donations.

According to the amended law, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court may dissolve a religious community with legal status – with the exception of established churches – if its activities conflict with the constitution or law or if the court rules its registration should have been denied. Parliament may dissolve an incorporated church if the Constitutional Court finds it is operating in violation of the constitution. If a religious community is dissolved without a legal successor, its assets, after satisfying creditors, become the property of the state and shall be used for public interest activities.

Under the amended law, 32 churches maintained their incorporated (or, in the new terminology, “established”) status. These include the Roman Catholic Church, a range of Protestant denominations, a range of Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, the Salvation Army, three Jewish groups (Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation, Hungarian Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community), and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the sole registered Hindu organization. The list also includes Buddhist and Muslim umbrella organizations, each encompassing a few individual groups. The amendment added the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the list of established churches.

By law, the state may neither operate nor establish any body for controlling or monitoring religious communities. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Copyright

law protects their names, symbols, and rites, while criminal law protects buildings and cemeteries.

The constitution establishes a unified system for the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsperson). The ombudsman investigates cases related to violations of fundamental rights – including religious freedom – and initiates general or specific measures for their remedy. These measures do not have the force of law.

Treaties with the Holy See regulate relations between the state and the Catholic Church, including financing of public services and religious activities and settling claims for property seized by the state during the Communist era. These treaties serve as a model for regulating state relations with other religious groups, although there are some differences in the rights and privileges the state accords to each of the religious groups with which it has agreements. The state has also concluded formal agreements with the Hungarian Reformed Church, Hungarian Lutheran Church, Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (Mazsihisz), and four Orthodox churches.

According to the amended law, established, registered, and listed churches may perform pastoral services in military facilities, prisons, and hospitals. Other laws indicate religious associations may also have the right to provide services at these facilities.

Military and law enforcement personnel may freely practice their religion in private and also at their workplaces if their religious practice does not violate their mandatory service duties. The Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches, and Jewish congregations (which the government generally calls “historical churches”) may provide chaplain services to the military without seeking permission. Other religious communities must seek permission to offer such services.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion and provide them with special diets, such as kosher, vegetarian, and pork-free meals. Historical churches may provide pastoral services in prisons without special permission, but other, smaller religious groups may do so only within official visiting hours as outlined in individual agreements and with permission from the penitentiary. Similarly, historical churches receive automatic access to patients in hospitals to provide pastoral services, while other groups may do so only under certain conditions, such as providing services only during visiting hours.

One hour per week of faith and ethics or general ethics education is mandatory through the first eight grades of public school. Parents and students choose between the faith and ethics class offered by an established church of their choosing or a secular ethics course taught by public school teachers. Other religious communities are not entitled to provide religious education as part of the mandatory curricula in public schools, but they may offer extracurricular, optional religious education in public schools at the request of parents or students. Private schools are not required to offer faith and ethics or ethics classes.

All religious communities registered in one of the four categories have the right to open their own schools. The state provides a subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, for employee salaries at all such schools. Only established churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for the schools' operating expenses. Other religious communities may apply for a supplementary operational subsidy, and the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC) may sign an individualized contract with them to cover these costs.

The law also affords all religious communities with legal status the right to assume operation of public schools if more than 50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school sign a petition to do so and the MHC approves the change. In these cases, the government may continue to fund the schools. Whether newly established or converted from public status, religious schools are free to conduct their own religious teaching without government input and to make faith education mandatory and not substitutable with an ethics class. The government inspects both religious and public schools every two years to ensure they conform to government standards.

The constitution prohibits speech that violates the dignity of any religious community. The law prohibits "calling for violence" – in addition to inciting hatred – against a religious community or its members, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. The law provides a maximum punishment of three years in prison for impeding someone else through violence or threats from freely exercising his or her religion or abusing an individual because of his or her religious affiliation.

Physical assault motivated by the victim's actual or presumed religious affiliation is a felony punishable by one to five years in prison. Violence against a member of the clergy is classified as violence against an "individual providing public service" and is also punishable with a prison sentence of one to five years. Any person who engages in preparation for the use of force against any member of a religious

community is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding two years.

The law prohibits public denial, expression of doubt, or minimization of the Holocaust, genocide, and other crimes against humanity committed by the National Socialist or Communist regimes, punishing such offenses with a maximum sentence of three years in prison. The criminal code makes wearing, exhibiting, or promoting in public the swastika, the logo of the Nazi SS, or the symbol of the Arrow Cross – a fascist, anti-Semitic party that allied with Nazi Germany – in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of victims a misdemeanor, punishable by five to 90 days' detention.

The law provides for the lifting of official immunity of a member of parliament (MP) who incites hatred against religious communities or publicly denies crimes of the Communist or National Socialist regimes. No MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

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

### **Government Practices**

Some previously deregistered religious communities expressed support for the provision in the amended religion law that allowed citizens to donate 1 percent of their taxes to all four tiers of religious communities, although some criticized the fact that religious communities could only receive these donations beginning in 2020. They also welcomed the decision to have a court rule on the registration applications of registered churches, listed churches, and religious associations and the introduction of criteria to qualify for the three lower categories.

According to the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), the amended law did not fully comply with the decisions of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The law did not restore the status of deregistered religious communities, which were still excluded from the category of established churches. The HCLU also stated the amended law did not guarantee equal treatment of churches by the state or eliminate distinctions between religious communities, and that granting established status still remained in the purview of parliament. It also said that since deregistered churches received compensation for pecuniary and nonpecuniary damages identified by the ECHR for the period between January 1, 2012 and September 15, 2016, these churches were entitled to



further compensation for the period from September 16, 2016 until April 15, 2019. In October the HCLU challenged the amended law in the Constitutional Court.

The government published a decree in October that outlined the application process for the other three tiers (registered churches, listed churches, and religious associations) and provided further clarifications on the operation of all four tiers. By year's end, some religious groups, for example Sim Shalom and MET, reported they had started the application to register as a religious association.

Prior to the entry into force of the amendment to the religion law, parliament did not vote on any of the 16 pending applications for incorporated church status by religious groups, and these application procedures expired. According to the PMO, in the case of these 16 groups, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court was conducting a simplified registration process for listed and registered church status in which it did not evaluate the number of 1 percent personal income tax donations they received in determining whether they qualified for listed or registered status, and allowing the groups to use previously submitted documents in their applications. According to the Budapest-Capital Regional Court's website, these 16 groups had until January 6, 2020 to apply under the simplified procedures.

Gabor Ivanyi, pastor and head of MET, said in October that the current legal framework put the operation of its social and educational institutions (such as schools and homeless shelters) at risk because financial support to churches depended on the discretion of the government. This dependence also discouraged churches from speaking freely on issues on which they disagreed with the government. In July Ivanyi filed a formal objection in court on the grounds that his church was required to submit an application for registration after the amended law entered into force, despite the absence of an official government decree specifying application rules. The court agreed to review the case.

In March the Budapest-Capital Regional Court rejected an appeal of a lawsuit by the COS against the government Data Protection Authority (DPA), which had investigated the COS for alleged criminal abuse of personal data and fined the COS and its central organization a total of 40 million forints (\$136,000) in 2017. The court upheld the DPA's finding and stated religious organizations also had an obligation to respect domestic and EU regulations regarding the protection of personal data. In August the National Police told local media the investigation of the COS continued.

In February the Supreme Court overturned an eviction order issued by Budapest's 13th District against the COS, thus allowing the COS to continue to use its headquarters building. District officials continued to deny the COS a certificate of occupancy for the building.

The government continued its public campaign of billboards and posters against a Jewish, Hungarian-born, U.S. citizen businessman. Some of the placards stated EU leaders were part of the businessman's plan to settle migrants from the Middle East and Africa in the country.

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary (OMH) said local and state authorities refused to sell or rent land or issue permits to Muslims for homes or mosques or to open or expand Muslim cemeteries. According to OMH, the lack of sufficient cemetery space for Muslims remained the most pressing problem for the Muslim community.

According to the PMO, during the 2018-19 school year, incorporated churches operated 16.7 percent of elementary and secondary schools (compared with 15 percent in 2017-18), and religious organizations operated 0.2 percent. Incorporated churches operated 9.7 percent of preschools (with students aged three to seven), compared with 7.5 percent in the previous year, and religious organizations operated 0.2 percent. There were 217,204 students – 49.8 percent of whom were in Catholic schools – studying at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by incorporated churches and religious organizations, compared with 214,243 in the previous year.

On September 2, Deputy PM Zsolt Semjen stated the number of church-run schools and students enrolled in them had doubled since 2010. He said 220,000 children studied in 1,067 church-run schools. On August 31, PMO Minister Gergely Gulyas stated in Pecs, at the joint school year opening ceremony of Reformed Church educational institutions of the Carpathian Basin, that churches operated 14 percent of schools, and that church schools offering an education “based on Christian values and knowledge” catered to all segments of society. Gulyas also said, “By resigning Christian culture and faith, it [Europe] could lose everything that has characterized the continent for generations and for centuries.” According to education experts cited in local media, an increasing number of students attended church-run schools due to greater government financial support for religious schools compared to state schools and more curriculum flexibility, such as using nonstate textbooks.

Jewish groups expressed concerns about praise by government officials for the country's WWII-era leaders and Hitler allies, as well as about public messaging they said could incite anti-Semitism. On September 4, Mazsihisz, the country's largest Jewish organization, issued a statement condemning the erection of a statue, and government officials' participation in its unveiling, of Gyula Kornis in the town of Vac. Kornis, a member of a Catholic religious order and leading education politician in the era of WWII leader Miklos Horthy, helped prepare and implement the country's anti-Semitic education laws in the 1920s. According to media, during remarks at the statue-unveiling ceremony, State Secretary in the MHC Bence Retvari praised Kornis as a "hero," and Maria Schmidt, a historian and Government Commissioner of the Memorial Year of the 1956 Revolution, who formulated the original proposal for the government-funded House of Fates Holocaust museum and education center, said Kornis "always kept the interest of the nation in view."

On November 16, several hundred supporters of the Mi Hazank (Our Homeland) Party marched in Budapest to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Horthy's entry into Budapest. Fidesz MP Janos Lazar laid flowers at Horthy's grave, calling him "a heroic soldier, a true Hungarian patriot whom we should remember by bowing our head." Mazsihisz president Andras Heisler expressed deep disappointment with Lazar, who he said in the past as PMO minister had worked to build good relations with Jewish organizations.

On June 4, the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) presented a new, preliminary outline for the House of Fates at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) meeting in Luxembourg. PM Orban named Chief Rabbi and head of EMIH Slomo Koves to direct and refashion the project in 2018. The museum and center, to be located in Budapest, had been on hold since 2014 due to opposition from domestic and international groups that criticized it as an attempt to obscure the involvement of the country and Miklos Horthy in the Holocaust. In Luxembourg, Koves said he expected the museum would open within 18 months. The IHRA said in Luxembourg it would appoint a group of experts to advise the international advisory boards of the House of Fates. The IHRA, stating it had not seen the new concept in any detail, welcomed Rabbi Koves' assurances that "a highly controversial historian" who had been involved in drafting an earlier concept for the project would no longer be involved. Prominent national and international Jewish groups continued to express concern about the project.

In April the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) submitted to the government its assessment of the scope and estimated value of confiscated heirless Jewish property in the country. As of year's end, the government had not agreed to WJRO's requests for further discussions on a roadmap to conclude negotiations.

In February Marie van der Zyl, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, met with PMO State Secretary for Civil Society Relations Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky and reportedly described the meeting as an opportunity to raise concerns with the government over anti-Semitism, efforts to downplay actions by leaders in support of the Holocaust, and language used by PM Orban against a Jewish, Hungarian-born U.S. citizen businessman. In a letter, Szalay-Bobrovniczky rejected her allegations of anti-Semitism against his government and PM Orban.

Government officials continued to make statements in defense of what they called a "Christian Europe" and describe migration, particularly of Muslims, as a threat. In his annual state of the nation speech in February, PM Orban stated the future of Central Europeans lies in the "protection of our families and our Christian culture" against immigration, which he said led to the "virus of Islamic terrorism." In an April 9 speech, he said, "Islamic culture has conquered new territories," and in September he stated, "The Hungarian state rests on the foundations...of Christian democracy." In a March 2 interview with German newspaper *Die Welt am Sonntag*, PM Orban said, "There used to be anti-Semitism on the Christian right wing in Hungary, but we curbed it," and, "The true threat of anti-Semitism in Europe now comes through immigration." In September PMO State Secretary in Charge of Church and Nationality Issues Miklos Soltesz stated at the inauguration of a renovated Catholic church in the village of Segesd in Somogy County that the country had again become "the bastion of Christianity in Europe." He added that, as when it had fought against Mongol and Turkish invasions, the country was now "stopping the Muslim flood." During the Fidesz party convention on September 29, PM Orban said, "We have established a Hungarian Christian Democrat state...we have the right to organize our life according to the laws of Christian freedom."

Between July 29 and August 7, the country hosted the 15th European Maccabi Games, an international Jewish sporting event, which occurred without incident. In July, when meeting with the organizers of the games, PM Orban stated the government provided protection and major support to the country's Jewish community for preserving its identity and for the renaissance of Hungarian Jewish life. The government provided approximately five billion forints (\$17 million) for

the games, and more than 2,000 athletes from 42 countries participated in the event. Mazsihisz President Heisler said that the games represented an event of special importance to the country's Jewish community.

The government provided 64.8 billion forints (\$220.2 million) to incorporated churches (compared with 118.1 billion forints, \$401.3 million, during 2018), of which 94 percent – 61.6 billion (\$209.3 million) – went to what the government and media called the country's four historical churches. The Roman Catholic Church received 39.9 billion forints (\$135.6 million), the Reformed Church 15.9 billion forints (\$54 million), the Evangelical Church 3.4 billion forints (\$11.6 million), Mazsihisz 1.9 billion forints (\$6.5 million), EMIH 330 million forints (\$1.1 million), and the Jewish Orthodox community 222.5 million forints (\$756,000). According to the PMO, direct state funding fell by nearly half because the 2018 amount included special funding for the renovation of church buildings. The PMO stated it would continue to submit proposals for emerging investment needs to the government.

The religious communities that received the bulk of the government's contribution used the funds for such activities as maintenance of buildings, public educational and social services, support for religious instruction and culture, support for community programs and investments, employee wages, and support for faith-based activities of citizens living abroad.

According to tax authorities tracking the 1 percent personal income tax allocations designated to incorporated churches, 993,955 citizens donated their 1 percent personal income tax to one of the incorporated churches, according to statistics published in March that reflected 2018 data. As in previous years, the church bodies receiving the most donations were the Catholic Church, with 529,123 persons contributing 2.5 billion forints (\$8.5 million); Hungarian Reformed Church, with 210,301 persons contributing 1 billion forints (\$3.4 million); and Lutheran Church, with 60,358 persons contributing 310 million forints (\$1.1 million). The Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness ranked fourth, with 46,373 persons contributing 250 million forints (\$850,000).

According to the PMO, during the year, religious organizations provided government-funded social services to 189,439 persons and child protection services to 12,300 persons. The Catholic Church provided 26.6 percent of total services, the Reformed Church 25.7 percent, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church 18.7 percent.

In December the government awarded EMIH 1.8 billion forints (\$6.1 million) to create a cultural center.

In November the government hosted the second international conference on Christian persecution. PM Orban stated at the conference that Christianity was under threat from forces such as political correctness and the “Muslim immigration invasion.”

On September 6, PM Orban met with Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the foreign affairs office of the Russian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate and discussed the persecution of Christians around the world, deepening cooperation between eastern and western Christian denominations, and the work of the Russian Orthodox Church in the country.

The country is a member of the IHRA.

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

The NGO Action and Protection Foundation, which monitored anti-Semitism, reported 32 anti-Semitic incidents in 2018, the most recent year for which data was available, including three cases of assault, 19 of hate speech, and 10 of vandalism. Muslim organizations did not collect statistical data and said many members did not report incidents because they did not trust authorities would take any effective action. Muslim leaders, however, said anti-Muslim incidents decreased compared with 2018, although they added there were new forms of discrimination, and the majority of the population regarded Muslims with suspicion.

In the city of Nyiregyhaza on August 18, according to press reports, five men spit on and yelled anti-Semitic insults at a Jewish man and his wife as they returned from praying at a synagogue. The couple told police the men shouted, “Filthy Jews belong in the gas chamber,” and “Sieg Heil!” Police launched an investigation.

According to OMH, an employer fired a Muslim who prayed during his colleagues’ smoking break because the employer “didn’t tolerate religious extremism.” The employee did not take legal action.

According to research by the Median Public Opinion Research Institute conducted on behalf of TEV in November 2018 and published in July, 33 percent of respondents held strongly or moderately anti-Semitic views (compared with 37

percent in 2017). The report stated 15 percent of respondents believed there were no gas chambers in concentration camps, 21 percent believed Jews made up the great majority of stories of Holocaust horrors, and 26 percent believed the number of Jewish Holocaust victims was “a lot lower” than generally stated – the highest percentages for all these statements in surveys dating to 2006.

In November the Anti-Defamation League released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country’s residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were “probably true” or “probably false.” The proportion agreeing that various statements were “probably true” was: 55 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Hungary; 71 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 59 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

In January the EC published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each EU member state. According to the survey, 45 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in Hungary, and 26 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 46 percent; on the internet, 46 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 44 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 46 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 47 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 44 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 40 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 51 percent; and anti-Semitism in the media, 47 percent.

In May the EC carried out a study in each EU member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 31 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Hungary, while 62 percent said it was rare; 80 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 90 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, 84 percent said they would be with an atheist, 84 percent with a Jew, 73 percent with a Buddhist, and 59 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 87 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 76 percent if atheist, 77 percent if Jewish, 60 percent if Buddhist, and 43 percent if Muslim.

A Pew Research Center survey released in October found 58 percent of residents in the country had an unfavorable opinion of Muslims – compared with 72 percent in 2016 – and 11 percent a favorable one. The same survey found that 60 percent of persons had a favorable view of Jews, and 18 percent an unfavorable one.

In November posters appeared in Budapest showing independent online news site Index.hu journalists Gabor Miklosi and Andras Dezso, both Hungarian, in front of an Israeli flag with the caption, “We have also come from beyond the border.” The poster featured the *Index.hu* logo next to the words, “constant complaining, latent anti-Hungarian feelings, betrayal of the homeland.” TEV reported the case to police as anti-Semitic. In a tweet, the Israeli embassy condemned the posters as containing anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli symbols and insinuations.

During a local soccer match between the country’s Dorog and MTK clubs in August, approximately 100 Dorog fans yelled anti-Semitic chants such as “dirty Jews” and “only through the chimney.” Following an open letter of protest from Mazsihisz President Andras Heisler to President of the Hungarian Football Federation Sandor Csanyi asking him to act against hate speech and anti-Semitism, the federation fined Dorog 200,000 forints (\$680). Heisler commented the federation did not publicly condemn the incident.

In August and September unknown assailants repeatedly damaged the Living Memorial to Holocaust victims on Budapest’s Liberty Square, which activists previously established to protest against a controversial memorial to victims of the German invasion of 1944. On August 20, the national holiday of Saint Stephen’s Day, the far-right website *kuruc.info* published an article entitled, “Liberty Square was waiting for National Day to be cleaned – our reader cleaned up the Jewish garbage,” which included a photograph of objects taken from the memorial lying in a garbage can.

In October approximately 50 members of a group widely described as neo-Nazi, calling itself the Legio Hungaria, vandalized Aurora, a community and cultural center in Budapest owned by a Jewish organization – tearing down and setting fire to the center’s rainbow flag and spraying graffiti on the wall of the building. Newly elected District Mayor Andras Piko condemned the attack and promised police would provide additional security. In November the Budapest Police brought in for questioning nine persons in connection with the attack; no arrests were reported.



In July, at a memorial in Budapest for Roma victims of the Holocaust, vandals left graffiti stating, “The place for ... [a prominent Jewish American financier] is in a gas chamber.”

A 2018 Pew Research survey stated 17 percent of citizens reported they were strongly religious, and the same percentage said they attended religious services regularly.

The Christian-Jewish Society, an informal platform for discussion by the Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist Churches and Jewish religious groups, held events such as joint prayers on the International Day of Holocaust remembrance, and also helped organize the March of the Living annual Holocaust remembrance event in April in Budapest.

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

In meetings with government officials, including the PMO, U.S. embassy representatives and visiting U.S. officials continued to advocate for increased religious freedom and discussed Holocaust commemoration, the amendment to the religion law, an inclusive approach for the House of Fates Holocaust museum, and restitution of heirless Jewish property seized during the Holocaust.

The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited the country in May and, accompanied by embassy officials, met with high-level representatives from the PMO, Jewish religious leaders, and civil society representatives to discuss religious freedom, anti-Semitism, and the House of Fates.

The Deputy Administrator for USAID, the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and the Charge d’ Affaires discussed the importance of religious freedom in formal remarks at a Thanksgiving dinner the embassy cohosted with the government. A wide range of religious leaders and civil society representatives attended the dinner.

Embassy and visiting Department of State officials met with representatives of the Jewish community to discuss anti-Semitism and the challenges of promoting tolerance education and historical truth, the community’s relationship with the government, the House of Fates, restitution issues, and commemoration of the Holocaust.

Embassy officials maintained regular contact with leaders of religious communities, including the four historical groups, as well as Baptists, Muslims, the COS, and religious groups that lost incorporated church status in 2011, such as MET, Bet Orim, and Sim Shalom, to understand their concerns, encourage religious freedom and tolerance, and discuss the effects of the religion law and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The Ambassador met with a Holocaust survivor in April and emphasized U.S. commitment to Holocaust remembrance and religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy officials participated in events organized by various Jewish congregations, such as March of the Living, inauguration of new synagogues, Hanukkah candle lightings, and the opening of a Holocaust exhibition to highlight support for the Jewish community and promote religious tolerance. At all these events, embassy representatives reiterated U.S. support for religious freedom and discussed issues of concern to the Jewish community.