

UKRAINE 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

In February 2014 Russian military forces occupied Crimea. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262, adopted on March 27, 2014, and entitled “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine,” states the Autonomous Republic of Crimea remains internationally recognized as within Ukraine’s international borders. The U.S. government does not recognize the purported annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and considers Crimea still to be a part of Ukraine.

UKRAINE

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and provides for the separation of church and state. According to the law, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship. The president and other members of government continued to appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul to help overcome the division of the country’s Orthodox Christians. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) criticized what it said was the government’s failure to address discrimination against the UOC-MP by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and local governments sympathetic to the UOC-KP and to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). Religious leaders continued to call on the government to simplify the registration procedures for religious groups; the government instructed ministry officials to develop a plan to do so. Parliament amended the tax code to secure the retention of nonprofit status by religious organizations. Religious leaders also continued to urge the government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims. In August the National Guard announced it had implemented a ban on UOC-MP chaplaincy in National Guard units, which the Ministries of Culture and of Justice had endorsed in 2016. In various regions of the country, minority religious groups continued to report discriminatory treatment by local authorities in land allocation for religious buildings. The cities of Kyiv and Lviv honored World War II nationalist leaders who collaborated with Nazis, and whose subordinates were involved in killing thousands of Jews. The city of Vinnytsya erected a monument to a leader of the 1918-1921 Ukrainian People’s Republic who did not intervene to stop anti-Jewish pogroms in which anti-Semites, including some members of his military forces, killed tens of thousands of Jews.

Russia-led forces continued to control parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and to detain and imprison religious leaders. A military tribunal in Donetsk sentenced an academic specializing in religious studies to 32 months in prison; Russian proxy authorities later released him in a prisoner exchange with the government of Ukraine. A “People’s Council” amendment to the local “law” on religion empowered Russian proxy authorities to abolish religious groups and associations. Russia-led forces continued to occupy religious buildings of minority religious groups and use them as military facilities.

There was a report of a grenade thrown at Jewish pilgrims on a pilgrimage in Uman and a subsequent arrest. Other religious groups and radical political groups, including the Right Sector, disrupted UOC-MP prayer services, and in some cases, radical nationalists physically assaulted parishioners. Baptist Union representatives accused members of a UOC-MP congregation of disrupting a religious ceremony. UOC-MP and UOC-KP pilgrimage marches in Kyiv celebrating St. Volodymyr’s Feast Day were peaceful. Thanksgiving Day events hosted by Protestant churches, the UGCC pilgrimage to the Zarvanytsa and Hoshiv Icons, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) pilgrimage to the Berdychiv Icon of the Mother of God, and Jewish community pilgrimages to most Jewish holy sites were all peaceful. A number of mainly smaller religious groups and churches established a new organization, the All-Ukraine Council of Religious Associations (AUCRA), to represent them. UOC-MP leaders stated the UOC-KP continued its efforts to seize churches belonging to the UOC-MP; the UOC-KP again stated it was parishioners and not the UOC-KP who had initiated the transfers of affiliation. The Jewish community remained concerned about new construction on the site at Lviv’s Krakivskiy Market located on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery. Nationalists staged a march to honor a World War II-era nationalist leader at which participants chanted anti-Semitic slogans. There were reports of vandalism of Christian monuments, Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries, and at Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls. The All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) and AUCRA worked to promote interfaith dialogue and religious diversity.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met with the Presidential Administration, ministry officials, and members of parliament to discuss the protection of religious heritage sites, problems posed by manifestations of anti-Semitism, and issues related to the division within the Orthodox Church. The Ambassador and embassy officials continued to urge religious groups to resolve property disputes peacefully, in particular the dispute regarding the location of parts of the Krakivskiy Market on the site of the city’s Old Jewish Cemetery.

Embassy officials continued to meet with internally displaced Muslims from Crimea to discuss their continuing inability to practice their religion freely in Crimea. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government, religious, and community leaders to promote Holocaust history education and the protection of Holocaust memorial sites.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 44 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the March national survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, an independent public policy think tank, 68.2 percent of respondents self-identify as Christian Orthodox, 7.8 percent Greek Catholic, 1.3 percent Jewish, 1 percent Roman Catholic, 0.8 percent Protestant and 0.2 percent Muslim. Another 7 percent self-identify as “simply a Christian” and 12.6 percent say they do not belong to any religious group. Small percentages of Buddhists, Hindus, adherents of other religions, and individuals not disclosing their religion comprise the rest of the respondents.

The same survey breaks down the 68.2 percent identifying as Christian Orthodox as 26.5 percent UOC-KP; 12 percent UOC-MP, 24.3 percent “just an Orthodox believer;” 3.5 percent the Russian Orthodox Church (as distinct from the UOC-MP) and other Orthodox groups; 1.1 percent the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC); and 0.8 percent undecided.

According to the Ministry of Culture, the UOC-KP has congregations in all oblasts (regions) of the country; the largest numbers of UOC-KP followers reside in the western and central regions of the country. The UOC-MP has congregations throughout the country. Most of the UAOC’s congregations are in the western part of the country.

Followers of the UGCC, the largest non-Orthodox church with an estimated four million members, reside primarily in the western oblasts of Lviv, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil. The RCC has an estimated one million members. Most of its congregations are in Lviv, Khmelnytsky, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsya, and Zakarpattya Oblasts.

The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine is the largest Protestant community. Other Christian groups include Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Calvinists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Government agencies and independent think tanks estimate the Muslim population at 500,000. Some Muslim leaders put the number at two million. According to government figures, the majority are Crimean Tatars, numbering an estimated 300,000.

According to the most recent government census data from 2001, 103,600 Jews live in the country, constituting approximately 0.2 percent of the population. The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) states there are approximately 300,000 persons of Jewish ancestry in the country. According to VAAD, before the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, approximately 30,000 Jewish persons lived in the Donbas region. Jewish groups estimate between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish residents lived in Crimea before Russia's attempted annexation. There are also Buddhists, practitioners of Falun Gong, Bahais, and adherents of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship. By law the government may restrict this right only in the “interests of protecting public order, the health and morality of the population, or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons.” The constitution provides for the separation of church and state and stipulates, “No religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory.”

By law the objective of religious policy is to “restore full-fledged dialogue between representatives of various social, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship.”

The law requires a religious institution seeking to receive official status as a legal entity to register both as a religious organization and as a nonprofit organization. To obtain official religious status an organization must register either with the Ministry of Culture, the government agency responsible for religious affairs, or with regional government authorities, depending upon the nature of the organization. Religious centers, administrations, monasteries, religious brotherhoods, missions, and religious schools register with the Ministry of Culture. Religious groups and congregations register with the regional authorities where they operate, either with the city government in Kyiv or the respective oblast

government outside of Kyiv. While these religious groups and congregations may form the constituent units of a nationwide religious organization, the nationwide organization does not register on a national basis nor may it obtain recognition as a legal entity; rather, the constituent units register and obtain legal entity status.

To be eligible for registration, a religious group must have at least 10 adult members and must submit its statutes to the registration authorities. To obtain status as a nonprofit organization, a religious group must register with the Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for maintaining the government's register of legal entities. This register lists all entities with this status, including religious ones. The law does not specify which of the two registration procedures must be undertaken first.

Without legal entity status, a religious group may not own property, conduct banking activities, or publish materials. Per the stipulation against national registration, only the registered constituent units of a nationwide religious organization may own property or conduct business activities, either for themselves or on behalf of the nationwide organization. The law grants property tax exemptions to religious organizations and considers them nonprofit organizations.

The law requires commanders of military units to allow their subordinates to participate in religious services but bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units. The Ministry of Defense defines selection criteria for clerics to become chaplains, the status of chaplains in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the armed forces, National Guard, and State Border Guard Service.

The law gives prison chaplains access to both pretrial detainees and sentenced inmates. It also protects the confidentiality of confession heard by prison chaplains, prohibits the use of information received during confession as evidence in legal proceedings, and does not allow the interrogation of clerics, interpreters, or other persons about matters associated with the confidentiality of confession.

According to the constitution, organizers must notify local authorities in advance of any type of planned public gathering, and authorities may challenge the legality of the planned event. According to a 2016 Constitutional Court decision, religious organizations need only to inform local authorities of their intention to hold a public gathering, and need not apply for permission or notify authorities within a specific period in advance of the event.

The law allows religious groups to establish theological schools to train clergy and other religious workers, as well as seek state accreditation through the Ministry of Culture for their curriculum. The law states theological schools shall function based on their own statutes.

Government agencies authorized to monitor religious organizations include the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and all other “central bodies of the executive government.”

Only registered religious groups may seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the Communist regime. Religious groups must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. The law states consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month.

The law prohibits the teaching of religion as part of the mandatory public school curriculum and states public school training “shall be free from interference by political parties, civic and religious organizations.” Public schools include ethics of faith or similar faith-related courses as optional parts of the curriculum.

The law provides for antidiscrimination screening of draft legislation and government regulations, including based on religion. The law specifies the screening be conducted in accordance with instructions developed by the Cabinet of Ministers, with the legal department of each respective agency responsible for verifying the draft legislation does not contain discriminatory language and requiring changes if it does. Religious groups may participate in the screening of draft legislation at the invitation of the respective agency.

The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization.

The Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsman is constitutionally required to release an annual report to parliament with a section on religious freedom.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious groups and defines the permissible activities of noncitizen clergy, preachers, teachers, and other representatives of foreign-based religious organizations. By law foreign religious workers may “preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,” but they may do so only for the religious organization that had invited

them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Since 2015, the government has exercised the right of derogation from its obligations under the ICCPR with regard to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the control of foreign forces, including the ICCPR provisions pertaining to religious freedom.

Government Practices

Summary Paragraph: The government reiterated its appeal to the Archbishop of Constantinople – New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, based in Istanbul, for recognition of an Orthodox Church in Ukraine independent from the Moscow Patriarchate. The UOC-MP continued to criticize what it said was the government's failure to address discrimination against the UOC-MP by the UOC-KP and local governments sympathetic to the UOC-KP and UGCC. In 2016 the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Justice endorsed a ban on UOC-MP chaplaincy in National Guard units. Religious leaders continued to call on the government to simplify registration procedures for religious groups; the government instructed ministry officials to do so as part of its action plan for 2016-2020. The parliament struck down a tax code provision requiring all registered religious organizations to reregister their statutes in order to retain nonprofit status. Religious leaders continued to urge the government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims. In different regions of the country, the UOC-KP, UOC-MP, UGCC, RCC, and other religious groups reported local authorities continued to give preference to the majority religious over the minorities on allocating land for religious buildings. Kyiv Muslims reported difficulties in receiving free land for burials, which was their legal right. The cities of Kyiv and Lviv honored World War II nationalist leaders whose subordinates were complicit in the killing of thousands of Jews. The city of Vinnytsya erected a monument to a leader of the 1918-1921 Ukrainian People's Republic responsible for participation of his military forces in anti-Jewish pogroms. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, in a May 18 letter, the Ministry of Culture reaffirmed that their religious buildings were sanctuaries, which afforded greater legal protection to Kingdom Halls.

On October 3, the Rivne Oblast State Administration turned down a reregistration application by a local Jehovah's Witnesses organization, stating that members of the organization were not allowed to preach or study the Bible outside Kingdom Halls.

On September 25, the Mykolayiv District Administrative Court revoked a decision by the Vitovsky District State Administration that denied a Jehovah's Witness the right to alternative nonmilitary service. On September 1, the Slovyansk District State Administration denied a request by a conscript, a Jehovah's Witness since 2011, to seek alternative service, citing lack of evidence that the applicant's religious beliefs were "genuine," and despite a letter from the Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses confirming the applicant's religious affiliation.

The procuracy continued an investigation into parliament member Vadym Novynsky's suspected involvement in the 2013 detention of Metropolitan Oleksandr, the personal secretary of then-UOC-MP leader Metropolitan Volodymyr. According to the prosecutor general, the detention was part of an effort involving then-President Yanukovich. Novynsky and several high-level officials of the Yanukovich government removed Volodymyr from his leadership position because he did not support church involvement in politics. On December 5, the prosecutor general said the delay in forwarding the case to a Kyiv court was likely due to the courts judges' bias in favor of Novynsky.

In his annual address to parliament on September 7, President Petro Poroshenko reiterated the government's appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch to grant recognition to an Orthodox Church independent of Moscow in the country. He stated such recognition would not lead to the "emergence of a state church or a ban on other Orthodox churches."

On May 11, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted its annual action plan to implement the National Strategy for Civil Society Development for 2016-2020. It instructed the Ministries of Justice, Culture, and Finance, as well as the State Fiscal Service, to simplify the registration of religious organizations – a step which religious leaders and human rights activists had repeatedly advocated the government to take.

On June 1, the AUCCRO, a longstanding independent interfaith board representing more than 90 percent of the country's religious organizations, urged the government to grant nonprofit status to religious organizations. The AUCCRO, which includes the UOC-MP, the UOC-KP, the UGCC, the UAOC, and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim religious groups, requested the government adopt amendments to the law on religion rather than requiring them to go through the reregistration procedure stipulated by the tax code, which AUCCRO characterized as "cumbersome." On December 7,

parliament struck down the tax code provision requiring all registered religious organizations to reregister their statutes in order to retain nonprofit status. The amendment guarantees automatic inclusion of religious organizations in the Register of Nonprofit Institutions and Organizations by the State Fiscal Service. Religious leaders and experts welcomed the move.

On August 17, the deputy commander of the National Guard told media outlets that the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Justice had endorsed the ban on UOC-MP chaplaincy in National Guard units prior to its introduction by the Interior Ministry in 2016. The Interior Ministry order referred to UOC-MP chaplains as clerics from religious groups whose centers were “located in an aggressor state.”

On July 5, the Ministry of Justice established the Pastoral Council for Religious Support of the Penitentiary System, an advisory interfaith board designed to promote prison chaplaincy. Since its creation, members of the council worked with the ministry to develop guidance for chaplains ministering to prisoners who faced torture, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Small religious groups continued to report discriminatory treatment by local governments with regard to the allocation of land for religious buildings in Ivano-Frankivsk, Mykolayiv, Odesa, and Ternopil Oblasts and the City of Kyiv. Roman Catholics, UOC-KP members, UGCC members, and Muslims continued to report instances of discrimination. UGCC representatives continued to report local authorities in Sumy and Odesa were unwilling to allocate land for UGCC churches. UOC-MP representatives reported a continued refusal by local authorities in the Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblasts to allocate land for UOC-MP churches. Roman Catholics reported a continued refusal by the government to support the restitution of Odesa’s Roman Catholic seminary building, which the Soviet regime had confiscated. Mormon representatives reported the continued failure of the Kyiv city government to reinstate a lease on land to build a house of worship.

On December 4, the Donetsk Appellate Economic Court upheld the June 27 ruling by the Donetsk Oblast Economic Court to revoke the 2015 decision by the Purification Church in Kostyanynivka, a Donetsk Oblast parish, to change its jurisdiction from the UOC-MP to UOC-KP. The court cited irregularities in appointment of parish members, and said the parish council’s decision contradicted its own statute requiring the parish to receive approval of a local UOC-MP bishop in order to change the jurisdiction. The UOC-KP criticized the verdict.

On November 3, the Kolomyia City and District Court upheld a complaint by a UOC-MP parish in Strykiv village, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast concerning police failure to investigate an incident, which occurred during an October 14 gathering of local residents. During the event, reportedly initiated by a village mayor and boycotted by a majority of UOC-MP supporters, most participants voted to change the parish affiliation of the local Annunciation Church to the UOC-KP. The UOC-KP rejected claims its supporters did not previously belong to the UOC-MP parish. According to the UOC-MP, UOC-KP members seized keys to the church during the meeting; after the incident, they relied on local police support to deny UOC-MP parishioners access to the building. A director of a local community center said she had to resign in response to pressure from village mayor Mykhaylo Dyakiv and the chief of the Kolomyia District Culture Department over her UOC-MP affiliation. UOC-KP members reportedly beat a UOC-MP parishioner as he tried to attend a November 4 service. Police at the scene told UOC-MP representatives they would only allow UOC-KP members to use the church, citing the need to prevent violent confrontation between the two groups. Violence erupted between UOC-MP and UOC-KP members November 12 as local police prevented UOC-MP representatives from entering the church while helping UOC-KP clerics enter for a religious service. During the scuffle a man reportedly belonging to the UOC-KP threw an elderly UOC-MP parishioner to the ground.

On November 22, the High Economic Court of Ukraine upheld a petition by the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ), ordering the Volyn Oblast Economic Court to reconsider a 2015 decision to allow the construction of a private industrial facility on the grounds of a Jewish cemetery near Toykut village in Volyn Oblast. The High Economic Court also upheld a lower court ruling to revoke the 2008 contract on the lease of the cemetery's land. In a separate case, on March 27, the Lviv District Administrative Court upheld a UCSJ petition to declare "illegal" the failure of the Volyn Oblast State Administration to protect the same Jewish cemetery in the Volyn Oblast, and to prevent construction on the cemetery grounds. The court ordered the Oblast Administration to rectify the issue. Pursuant to the order, on June 1, the Oblast Administration issued a resolution to determine the existence of the cemetery and register it as a protected heritage site. According to the UCSJ, however, as of the end of the year the facility continued to function on the cemetery grounds.

Kyiv's Muslim community said the local government, which allocates land for cemeteries, had not acted on the community's request for additional free land for

Islamic burials, which was their legal right. Muslim community leaders said it was running out of land for its burials.

All major religious organizations continued to appeal to the government to establish a transparent legal process to address property restitution claims. Most organizations reported continued problems and delays in the restitution process to reclaim property seized by the Communist regime; they said the consideration of claims often continued to take longer than the month prescribed by law. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups stated a number of factors continued to complicate the restitution process, including intercommunity competition for particular properties, current use of some properties by state institutions, the designation of some properties as historic landmarks, local governments disputing jurisdictional boundaries, and previous transfers of some properties to private ownership. They continued to report local officials taking sides in property restitution disputes, such as the case of the Lviv City government's continued denial of RCC requests for restitution of several properties that had been turned over to the UGCC.

The AUCCRO called on the government to revive the interagency Commission to Realize the Rights of Religious Organizations, established to address complex restitution issues, as well as promote dialogue between the government and religious groups. It last met in 2012.

RCC leaders stated they continued to ask authorities to return former Church properties in the western part of the country and elsewhere. The RCC leaders reported the government's continuing refusal to support the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary building, which the Soviet regime confiscated.

Jewish community leaders reported continued difficulties with the Ternopil municipal and district governments with regard to property restitution. The Ternopil District Council continued to reject local Jewish community requests to return a prayer house confiscated during the Soviet regime.

Muslim community leaders expressed concern over the continued lack of resolution of restitution claims involving historic mosques in Mykolayiv.

The AUCCRO continued to appeal to parliament to impose a moratorium on the privatization of previously confiscated religious buildings. Despite renewed government promises to address the issue, the government had taken no action by the end of the year.

The Jewish community expressed concern over the continued failure of local government authorities to protect historic religious properties, particularly historic synagogues in Lviv.

UOC-MP representatives renewed their complaints about what they said was the continuing inadequacy of the central government's response to discrimination and intolerance toward its members by UOC-KP and UGCC representatives and high-ranking UOC-KP and UGCC supporters in some local governments.

In line with the country's 2015 decommunization and denazification law, some local authorities continued to rename Communist-era streets, bridges, and monuments in honor of 20th century Ukrainian nationalists, some of whom were associated with anti-Semitism.

On June 13, a Kyiv administrative court upheld a motion by opponents of a proposal to rename a city street in honor of Roman Shukhevych, one of the leaders of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and commander of the Nazi-controlled Nachtigall battalion. The two groups collaborated with the Nazis in the early years of World War II, and according to historian Ihor Shchupak, director of the Tkuma All-Ukrainian Holocaust Research Center, some members of these two groups killed Jews. Although the court had suspended the renaming, the Kyiv City Council approved renaming the street in late June. From June 30-July 2, the city of Lviv held a festival honoring Shukhevych's 110th birthday. The director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee was quoted in the press as calling the event "disgraceful." On July 5, the Simon Wiesenthal Center condemned the naming of Kyiv streets after Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, opposing "the glorification of the two Ukrainian nationalist leaders whose men actively participated in the mass murder of Jews during the initial months following the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union."

On October 17, the World Jewish Congress issued a statement criticizing the city of Vinnytsya for erecting a monument to Symon Petlyura, a leader of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1918-1921 who did not intervene to stop a series of anti-Jewish pogroms in which anti-Semites, including some members of his military forces, killed tens of thousands of Jews.

In a televised interview in late March, Nadiya Savchenko, an opposition party parliamentarian said Jews exercised too much power in the country and "possess 80 percent of the power when they only account for 2 percent of the population." In an interview earlier in March, she agreed with a listener calling in who spoke

out against a “Jewish takeover” of the country. Government officials publicly condemned her remarks.

Religious leaders continued to appeal to the government to adopt the Concept of Church-State Relations, which would shape cooperation between the government and religious groups and provide long-term basis for legislation on religious issues.

During a July 4 meeting with the AUCCRO, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman reaffirmed the government’s commitment to promoting religious freedom and dialogue with religious communities. In his September 7 speech to parliament, President Poroshenko reaffirmed the government’s commitment to freedom of worship, saying each citizen independently had chosen and would continue to choose “his or her faith and church.”

The government supported efforts by the Protestant community to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation by assisting with organizing educational and cultural events.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Russia-led forces in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts continued to detain and imprison members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as well as other religious leaders.

On May 3, a Russia-controlled “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DPR) “military tribunal” sentenced 63-year old President of the Center for Religious Studies and International Spiritual Relations, Ihor Kozlovsky, detained in 2016, to two years and eight months in prison, describing him as an “unreliable citizen” due to his contacts with Ukrainian organizations “outlawed” in the “DPR.” “DPR” representatives reportedly physically abused Kozlovsky following his arrest and threatened to detain and torture his bedridden son. On May 12, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine appealed to the international community to support efforts to secure Kozlovsky’s release. The ministry attributed Kozlovsky’s imprisonment to his “professional activity protecting religious freedom.” Russia-led forces released Kozlovsky in a prisoner exchange on December 27.

According to the Baptist Union, on September 20, “DPR” militants stopped Pastor Mykhaylo Nahirnyak at a checkpoint and banned him from returning to his home in Yenakiyev, Donetsk Oblast, which Russia-led forces controlled, citing a decision by the “DPR Ministry of State Security.” On August 24,

militants operating a “DPR” checkpoint prevented Oleksandr Nahirnyak, pastor of another Yenakiyev church, from returning to his family and church.

On February 10, the Russia-controlled “DPR” “People’s Council” passed amendments to the “DPR” 2016 “Law on the Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations” giving the “DPR” “Ministry of Culture” more powers to monitor the registration of religious associations in the region and to abolish them on various grounds. The revised law continued to require a religious association to register either as a “religious group,” which did not afford the group status as a legal entity or as a “religious organization.” The requirement remained for a newly created religious association seeking legal status to submit written notification to authorities about its function, location, administration, and the names and home addresses of its members. A religious group had to notify authorities about its continued existence annually, at which time the “DPR” authorities had ten days to either put the group on the “Register of Religious Groups” or turn down the notification. The “DPR” authorities had a month to examine the application documents of a religious association seeking “religious organization” status. In either case, the “DPR” authorities could conduct a “state religious expert evaluation” of the documents, which could take up to six months, or deny a registration request on a number of grounds, such as missing required information or if authorities had banned the registration of the religious entity that was applying.

On September 11, the “Luhansk People’s Republic” (LPR) “Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport” created an “expert council” to screen local religious organizations, stating the “LPR” could not register them as legal entities without the council’s approval. The “LPR” also ordered leaders of those religious organizations to hold mandatory consultations with the “expert council.”

As of the end of the year, Jehovah’s Witnesses reported “DPR” and “LPR” representatives had seized six of their buildings and searched seven. During the year “DPR” and “LPR” representatives also interrogated 170 Jehovah’s Witnesses.

According to media reports, in August “LPR Deputy Minister of State Security” Aleksandr Basov stated that “LPR” authorities had stopped the activity of Jehovah’s Witness congregations in Luhansk and Alchevsk Oblasts describing its members as “extremists,” supporters of “neo-Nazi groups,” and “agents of influence” of the Ukrainian security services. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, their situation in the “DPR” sharply deteriorated after its acting “Prosecutor-

General” Andriy Spivak pledged to fight “extremism” in his remarks to the “DPR People’s Council” in December 2016.

According to nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports, Russia-led forces continued their use of previously seized places of worship as military facilities. Jehovah’s Witnesses stated Russia-led forces used some places of worship as barracks.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on August 4, a group of armed representatives of the “LPR State Security Ministry” broke into a Kingdom Hall in Alchevsk, Luhansk Oblast as congregation members gathered for worship. The “LPR Interior Minister” and the town’s “acting prosecutor” also came to the Kingdom Hall. The gunmen escorted congregation members to a local military facility and held them for eight hours in scorching heat without access to drinking water or toilets. Representatives of the “ministry” questioned the detainees, including children and teenagers questioned in the absence of their parents. Authorities ordered local Jehovah’s Witnesses minister Andriy Mezhytsky to pay a fine of 2,392 hryvnia (\$85) for organizing “an unsanctioned mass gathering.” “Ministry” representatives searched his home, and confiscated his computer and other electronic devices. During the search of the Kingdom Hall, the armed representatives reportedly planted and “found” several envelopes with pro-Ukrainian leaflets. The “LPR” authorities confiscated the Kingdom Hall on the same day.

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that on August 4, armed representatives of the “LPR Ministry for Emergencies” and “State Security Ministry” came to a Kingdom Hall in Luhansk, citing the need to investigate a bomb threat. They ordered approximately 200 members of the congregation to stop a religious service and assemble outside the building. During a subsequent search, the armed representatives confiscated all video and audio equipment, computers, and religious materials. They also questioned some congregation members, particularly elderly women, and confiscated the Kingdom Hall. On August 28, the “LPR State Security Ministry” said it found Nazi symbols and pro-Ukrainian leaflets during the search.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on September 23, “LPR police officers” detained Lyudmyla Kostyuk and Natalya Mordovtseva, who were privately sharing their religious beliefs with local residents. The detainees were undressed to their underwear and searched in the presence of five men. During the five-hour interrogation, “police” forced the detainees to stand for the duration and threatened

them with lengthy imprisonment. The interrogation continued for another hour at the “State Security Ministry,” and authorities searched Kostyuk’s home.

On July 2, Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that “DPR police” held Jehovah’s Witnesses Viktor Vertel and Nadia Havrylova in detention for four hours for distribution of religious literature in Donetsk. Authorities” threatened the detainees with a ten-day arrest if they continued their activity. Police officers photographed the detainees and collected their fingerprints.

On October 14, five “LPR police officers” and “State Security Ministry” representatives disrupted religious service at the private home of 84-year-old Mykhailo Bukovar, according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They searched the residence and took Bukovar and other Jehovah’s Witnesses to a police department for interrogation. On November 27, an “LPR court” ordered congregation member Volodymyr Safarov, who prayed aloud during the raid, to pay a fine of 2,392 hryvnia (\$85) for “organizing an unsanctioned gathering of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” The “court” accused Jehovah’s Witnesses of “restricting the rights and freedoms of other people,” and described visits by Jehovah’s Witnesses to the homes of local residents as “violation of public peace.”

On November 17, “LPR police” interrogated four Jehovah’s Witnesses during a raid on a Kingdom Hall in Krasnodon, Luhansk Oblast according to the Witnesses.

During the year, “DPR” authorities also raided Kingdom Halls in Donetsk, Novoazovsk, Dokuchayivsk, Yasynuvata, Khartsyzsk, Yenakiyev, Amvrosiyivka, Makiyivka, and Telmanove, Donetsk Oblasts. The Russian proxy authorities said it was “necessary for combatting extremism.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that “LPR Ministry of State Security officers” threatened local Jehovah’s Witness ministers in Sverdlovsk with negative consequences if they refused to cooperate with them. Unknown persons robbed and desecrated a Kingdom Hall in Luhansk and vandalized a Kingdom Hall in Donetsk in September. “LPR” and “DPR” “authorities” confiscated Kingdom Halls in Kirovsk, Alchevsk, Luhansk, Krasnodon, Horlivka, and Debaltseve.

On August 1, the “DPR Ministry of Justice” added Jehovah’s Witnesses periodicals *Awake* and *The Watchtower* to the “Republican List of Extremist Materials.” The “DPR Supreme Court” labeled materials distributed by the “Jehovah Witnesses sect” as extremist.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Summary Paragraph: There was a report of a grenade thrown at Jewish pilgrims on a pilgrimage in Uman; authorities later arrested a suspect. Other religious groups and the Right Sector political movement disrupted UOC-MP prayer services; in some cases, individuals described as radical nationalists physically assaulted parishioners. A number of primarily smaller religious groups and churches established a new organization to represent them. UOC-MP leaders stated the UOC-KP continued to seize churches belonging to the UOC-MP; the UOC-KP said parishioners initiated the transfers of affiliation and not the UOC-KP. The Right Sector political movement intervened at disputed religious properties on behalf of the UOC-KP and the UGCC. The Jewish community expressed its continued concern about the continuing existence of Lviv's Krakivskiy Market and construction on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery. Nationalists staged a march to honor a World War II nationalist leader at which participants chanted anti-Semitic slogans. There continued to be reports of vandalism at Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries, as well as reports of vandalism directed against Christian monuments and Jehovah's Witnesses' Kingdom Halls. Several religious figures and government officials reported suspicions that Russia had sponsored some anti-Semitic incidents and other religious vandalism as part of its efforts to destabilize Ukraine; in some cases, the Ukrainian government presented evidence. The AUCCRO and the newly created AUCRA worked to promote interfaith dialogue and religious diversity.

Chabad Rabbi Mendel Deitsch died in April from injuries he sustained in 2016 when four individuals attacked him at a train station in Zhytomyr. Authorities arrested the four suspects after the attack; the case continued at year's end.

According to the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group (NMRMG), an NGO supported by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities, no anti-Semitic violence was recorded during the year, compared with one case in 2016, one case in 2015, four cases in 2014, and four in 2013. The NMRMG reported that on March 30, a group of teenagers singled out and taunted a rabbi at the Most City Mall in Dnipro (formerly Dnipropetrovsk). One of the teenagers shoved the rabbi with his shoulder, and the rabbi's kippah fell to the floor. The teenagers shouted insults and threats, such as "you should all be killed" and "kikes get out of here." The conflict did not evolve beyond a heated verbal argument; no physical violence was involved beyond the shoving. Police opened an investigation.

According to police, on September 21, three individuals threw a hand grenade at Jewish pilgrims in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast, causing minor injury to a 13-year-old boy. According to an unconfirmed media report, a drunken person living in a nearby apartment building incidentally dropped the hand grenade on the roof of a private metal garage used by several pilgrims as inexpensive accommodation. Police detained the three individuals in early October and linked them to two former members of parliament who had fled to Russia in 2014. According to government officials, the main motive of the three individuals was to smear the country's reputation. The same individuals reportedly threw Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Lviv on June 30, causing minor damage to its wall. Officials reported the same individuals had defaced the wall of the Central Synagogue in Chernivtsi with anti-Semitic graffiti in November 2016, and in December 2016 had attacked worshippers and desecrated a synagogue near the grave of Rabbi Nachman, founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement, in Uman. Police also accused them of politically motivated attacks on several sites with no apparent religious significance, including the U.S. embassy. The NMRMG expressed doubt that the attackers had committed all those offenses. The suspects continued to remain under investigation.

On September 6, supporters of the Svoboda Party and its Sokil youth wing verbally and physically assaulted UOC-MP members who tried to stop their protest against construction of a UOC-MP church in Mykolayiv. The protestors accused congregation members of supporting Russian aggression against the country and damaged a gate and wooden formwork at the construction site. An elderly UOC-MP parishioner was reportedly hospitalized with a concussion and torn ligaments. Another parish member, whom the attackers reportedly tried to strangle, was also taken to a hospital. Police detained several of the protestors but soon released them. On August 26, unidentified individuals burned construction materials at the site. One of the attackers reportedly claimed responsibility for burning the materials and threatened parish members with another arson attack if they continued building the church. According to the UOC-MP, representatives of the two opposition groups had previously assaulted construction workers to prevent them from digging the foundation of the church.

On July 2, several dozen members of a local UOC-MP parish led by their priest disrupted a baptism ceremony conducted by Baptist Union members at a lake near Hrudky village, Volyn Oblast. They demanded the followers of the Baptist group not "desecrate the lake" and hold such ceremonies elsewhere. Some UOC-MP representatives reportedly pushed Baptist Union member Yaroslav Kot as he tried

to videotape the incident. According to the Baptist Union, the Hrudky village council chairman and the local police did nothing to resolve the dispute.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported 18 cases of physical assaults. In one case, they said a woman in Kyiv carried out 15 attacks, as well as threatened murder and damaged property. The Witnesses reported police did not investigate these attacks.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, on June 21, Oleh Nikitshyn verbally and physically assaulted and tried to strangle his coworker, Jehovah's Witness Yuriy Vorobei, and calling him a "saint" and "Stundist," a derogatory reference to Vorobie's membership in a minority Christian group. An eyewitness intervened and stopped the attack. Despite verifiable signs of physical trauma, law enforcement officials did not press charges.

On May 23, the mayor of Kolomyia in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast instructed members of the city council who had requested the government evict a UOC-MP congregation from the city's historic Annunciation Church not to use force against the congregation. The mayor instead suggested local activists should try to "convince" the parish members to leave the UOC-MP. On June 4, a group of Greek Catholic priests, accompanied by members of the Right Sector and Black Hundred groups, disrupted a UOC-MP prayer service in the church, accusing the worshipers of "serving the Russian aggressor" and insisting the parishioners leave the UOC-MP. In a statement issued on June 6, the UGCC Kolomyia and Chernivtsi Diocese publicly distanced itself from the June 4 events, describing them as a local community initiative. The UGCC also said it would not relinquish its rights to the church, which the Soviet regime confiscated from the UGCC in the 1940s and later transferred to the UOC-MP in 1991. In response, the UOC-MP stated it would take the case to court, stating the 16th century church was originally built as an Orthodox church. On June 29, the Kolomyia City and District Court upheld a UOC-MP complaint against the local police for refusing to investigate the June 4 incident. During the proceedings, opponents of the UOC-MP shouted insults at parish representatives in the courtroom and physically assaulted UOC-MP priest Vitaliy Dimnych when he prevented the opposition from seizing parish documents from a lawyer for the UOC-MP congregation. On October 4, the Ivano-Frankivsk District Administrative Court declared illegal a decision by the Kolomyia municipal police chief to seal the church entrance. On October 17, UGCC followers reportedly removed locks from the church entrance, taking control of the church. On October 22, UGCC followers, including their priest, Mykola Medynsky, verbally and physically assaulted UOC-MP members who tried to hold a prayer service in the church courtyard. Medynsky called UOC-MP

parishioners “Moscow’s pigs,” and reportedly pushed and punched some of them. The UOC-MP criticized local police for their reluctance to intervene. On October 26, UGCC leader Major Archbishop Svyatoslav condemned the use of force and urged participants in the dispute to respect the rule of law. He also attributed the confrontation to the municipal government’s “inconsistent” position regarding the Annunciation Church.

Jehovah’s Witnesses expressed concern over the failure of law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who assaulted Jehovah’s Witnesses, including attacks in Stryzhavka in 2013, Mykolayiv, Melitopol, Komyshaka, and Odesa in 2014, and Kyiv, Kamyanka, Lviv, Pryvillya, and Uman in 2016.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on August 2, an individual chanted an anti-Semitic slur and smashed mobile displays with Jehovah’s Witnesses’ materials in Poltava. He also threatened the two missionaries who were displaying the materials. The victims photographed the attacker and his car, but police reportedly refused to investigate the incident, saying it was not a crime.

On July 3, a man attacked two Jehovah’s Witnesses missionaries in Cherkasy, breaking a window of a nearby shop and forcing them to flee. Other Witnesses stopped the attacker. Police did not respond to three emergency calls from the victims, saying that no patrols were available at the time. Law enforcement authorities did not open an investigation.

There were no further developments in the police investigation of the 2015 killing of Roman Nikolayev, rector of the UOC-MP St. Tetyana’s parish in Kyiv.

On September 19, local government officials in Sumy Oblast stated they would not permit the UOC-MP to hold its annual march in Sumy city on October 14, stating the procession could cause a “confrontation.” Despite the ban, the UOC-MP held the march, which transpired without incident.

According to media estimates, more than 100,000 persons attended Protestant church-hosted Thanksgiving Day events to “thank God for His abundant blessings” in central Kyiv on September 17. Well-known Christian evangelists addressed the crowd.

On July 27, the UOC-MP celebrated St. Volodymyr’s feast day with a procession in Kyiv, which transpired without incident in contrast to the previous year, when nationalist groups harassed marchers and tried to prevent individuals in various

locales from joining the procession. Police estimated there were 15,000 participants.

The following day, the UOC-KP held its annual procession in Kyiv to mark St. Volodymyr's feast day. Police reported no incidents; media reported an estimated 4,000 individuals participated in the event.

According to the Ternopil Oblast State Administration, on July 15-16, more than 100,000 persons participated without incident in the UGCC annual national pilgrimage to the Zarvanytsya Icon of the Mother of God.

In September and October the annual Jewish New Year pilgrimages to the Uman burial site of Rabbi Nachman took place. According to media reports, more than 30,000 pilgrims visited Uman during the year. Media also reported Jewish pilgrims visited other burial sites of spiritual leaders in Belz, Medzhybizh, Berdychiv, and Hadyach, all without any significant difficulties.

According to the Ministry of Culture, the UOC-MP had 12,328 congregations throughout the country, while the UOC-KP had 5,114 and the UAOC had 1,195.

On January 26, a number of mainly smaller religious groups and churches, in conjunction with the NGO Ukrainian Association of Religious Experts, established the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Associations (AUCRA) for the stated purpose of promoting the country's spiritual revival, interfaith dialogue, and interaction between religious organizations and the government. AUCRA's membership included the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (Umma), Religious Association of Progressive Jewish Communities of Ukraine, the National Spiritual Association of Bahai of Ukraine, Association of Sons and Daughters of Native Ukrainian National Faith, Center of the Krishna Consciousness Communities in Ukraine, and the Apostolic Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Several AUCRA members said they were blocked from membership in the AUCCRO, which requires unanimous approval for new members.

The UOC-MP continued to make public statements saying that the UOC-KP was "emboldened" by police inaction and by support from groups, such as the Right Sector, to continue its efforts to seize UOC-MP church buildings. According to the UOC-MP, local authorities continued to transfer parish jurisdictions from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP against the will of the parishioners.

Posts on the Right Sector website repeated previous statements by the group stating that, at the request of the UOC-KP, it would continue to visit sites disputed between the UOC-MP and UOC-KP to “facilitate” a change of jurisdiction.

Following the UOC-MP and Right Sector statements, the UOC-KP repeated its previous statements, rejecting accusations about its involvement in the seizures of UOC-MP churches and saying these were legitimate transfers to UOC-KP jurisdiction initiated by parishioners. The UOC-KP stated it would continue to act according to the law, but also would continue to accept into its jurisdiction any UOC-MP clergy and laity requesting UOC-KP affiliation.

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported local religious communities continued to be denied zoning permits to build Kingdom Halls in 12 cities, towns, and villages.

The Jewish community continued to express its concern about the continuing operation of the Krakivskiy Market on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery in Lviv. The UCSJ expressed concern over the construction of a multi-story building on the cemetery grounds.

The UCSJ and civic activists also expressed concern over the possible continuation of construction of a high-rise building at the site of the World War II Jewish ghetto in Lviv. Although the project was suspended after human remains were reportedly found and removed from the soil at the construction site in 2016, the remains had not been returned to the site by year’s end.

Nationalists associated with the Svoboda Party conducted a march in Kyiv on New Year’s Day to celebrate the birthday of Stepan Bandera. Bandera was a leader of the 1930s and 1940s nationalist movement, whose members fought alongside Nazi soldiers against the Soviets in the first years of World War II, and some of whom were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews. According to media and NGO accounts, thousands of individuals reportedly attended the event, with some chanting “Jews out” in German (“Juden raus”). Government officials condemned the march, and Jewish community leaders called on authorities to prosecute those chanting such slogans for hate speech. As of the end of the year, authorities filed no charges.

According to the UOC-MP, on September 29 unidentified individuals claiming affiliation with the National Corps Party in Malyn, Zhytomyr Oblast, posted leaflets calling for the removal of UOC-MP priests from the region and describing them as “the Kremlin’s agents of influence.” A local UOC-MP priest stated a local

UOC-KP priest's aggressive rhetoric may have influenced the activists and could be behind the incident.

In April the Ternopil Oblast Right Sector branch initiated an outdoor advertising campaign describing UOC-MP clerics as "invaders" on billboards throughout the region.

On February 21, unidentified vandals smashed a window of the Nativity of Christ Church of the UGCC in Kozyatyn, Vinnytsya Oblast.

On April 24, unknown individuals burglarized the St. Demetrious Church of the UOC-MP in Odesa, damaging icons and stealing donations.

On July 17, unidentified individuals damaged a statue of the Mother of God affiliated with the RCC located in a public square in Lviv. According to media reports, earlier this year unknown vandals damaged two more statues of the Mother of God in the city.

According to media sources, in July unidentified individuals defaced a statue of the Mother of God with a tar-like substance near a UAOC church in Lutsk. Authorities discovered the vandalism on July 25.

In August unidentified individuals cut down and burned a cross at Polonyna Runa Mountain in Transcarpathia Oblast. Police detained three suspects, who remained under investigation at year's end.

On August 16, unidentified individuals destroyed a cross on the side of the road near the entrance to Odesa.

On October 2, unidentified individuals destroyed a cross and damaged a tombstone on the grave of Archbishop Oleksandr Petrovsky, revered by the Orthodox Church as a holy martyr, at a cemetery in Kharkiv.

In October unknown individuals defaced a street mural of Pope John Paul II in Kyiv with a swastika and anti-Polish graffiti.

On October 16, unknown individuals broke a cross and destroyed several sculptures at the outdoor Stations of the Cross of Lviv.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported 30 new incidents of vandalism against Kingdom Halls during the year, compared with 21 incidents of vandalism, including three arson attacks, in 2016. Incidents included an attack in January on a Kingdom Hall in Shpola, Cherkasy Oblast.

The NMRMG reported 24 cases of anti-Semitic vandalism during the year, compared with 19 in 2016 and 22 in 2015.

On February 26, a group of Right Sector activists held a ceremony to erect a memorial cross at the old Jewish cemetery in Kolomyia. They said buried at the site were members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a World War II pro-independence paramilitary group that fought against the Soviets, sometimes in collaboration with the Germans, but later fought against the Germans and also against Polish communists. The local Jewish community stated there were no Christian graves in the cemetery, and described the incident as a provocation. Although several Greek Catholic priests had participated in the ceremony, the UGCC Kolomiya and Chernivtsi Diocese issued an official statement saying the diocesan administration had "neither organized, received an invitation, nor delegated its priests" to attend the event. The statement went on to say, "some priests, guided by their personal beliefs, were present at the event for a joint prayer to commemorate victims of the communist regime." The local government stated it had not sanctioned the event.

The case against three suspects who had vandalized a local synagogue and cemetery and attempted to set fire to the *ohel*, a structure covering the grave of Chief Rabbi Gillel Boruch Liechtenstein, continued after a long delay in Kolomyia, Ivano Frankivsk Oblast. The Jewish community stated the delay was because of the court's "unwillingness" to handle the case. The hearing continued at year's end.

There continued to be reports of vandalism of Holocaust memorials and Jewish religious monuments, including in Cherkasy, Chernivtsi, Kyiv, Lviv, Nikopol, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Poltava, Rivne, and Ternopil Oblasts. Police investigations into these incidents continued at year's end.

According to media reports, on April 18, the Kostopil District State Administration, Rivne Oblast urged law enforcement agencies to identify and bring to justice perpetrators who in mid-April painted a swastika on a Holocaust memorial near the town. Local college students removed the graffiti and an investigation into the incident continued at year's end.

On January 13, arsonists damaged a Jewish cemetery in Kolomiya, where similar attacks occurred in 2015. A police investigation continued at year's end.

According to media sources, on June 9, unidentified individuals painted swastikas on the wall of a Jewish community center in Odesa. According to the NMRMG, workers of the center did not rule out that the incident could be a pro-Russian provocation.

On June 21, unidentified individuals defaced the Three Synagogues Memorial in central Lviv with a swastika and the inscription "White Power." The mayor called the incident "unacceptable" and appealed to police and the security services to find and punish the perpetrators. According to the NMRMG, on July 13, a witness saw three young men painting a swastika at on the memorial. He prevented them from escaping and called the police. Police then detained the vandals and forced them to remove the graffiti.

On June 30, unidentified individuals painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of a Lviv synagogue.

According to media reports, in late August unidentified individuals either toppled or destroyed some 20 tombstones at a Jewish cemetery in Svalyava. A local rabbi urged authorities to investigate the desecration. The investigation continued at year's end.

On December 13, unidentified individuals painted neo-Nazi graffiti on a Hanukah menorah in central Kyiv. On December 17, unidentified persons spilled a blood-like substance on the same menorah. The Kyiv mayor condemned the acts and police investigated both incidents as acts of hooliganism. The investigation continued at year's end.

On December 25, the words "death to kikes" appeared on the exterior wall of Hesed Shpira charity, funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, in Uzhhorod. The individuals responsible for the graffiti had not been identified at year's end.

According to media reports, unidentified individuals wrote anti-Semitic graffiti on three Jewish institutions in Odesa at the end of December. On December 25, the words "Toasting the Holocaust" appeared on the gate of Odesa's Holocaust museum. In another incident, unidentified individuals wrote "Jews out, Ukraine

for Ukrainians” on Brodsky Synagogue’s exterior face. An anti-Semitic symbol also appeared on a gate near the Beit Grand Jewish Community Center. In all three incidents, a Wolfsangel, a Nazi symbol, figured prominently at the center of the graffiti. A police investigation continued at year’s end.

Authorities continued to investigate the 2016 acts of vandalism against the Israeli flag in Babyn Yar, the *ohel* on the grave of Rabbi Aryeh Leib in Shpola, and desecration of the Holocaust monument in Uzhhorod.

Police investigations continued into the 2016 arson attacks on UOC-MP churches in Kyiv, including the Transfiguration Church, the Saint Agapitus Church, and the Church of Saint Petro Mohyla. Additionally, the arson and vandalism attack on the UGCC church in Ternopil remained under investigation at year’s end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador, embassy officials, and other U.S. government officials continued to meet with the Presidential Administration; the Ministries of Culture, Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs; as well as with members of parliament, political parties, and local officials. They discussed continuing concerns about the government’s response to the division within the Orthodox Church, the preservation of religious heritage sites, support for religious minorities, and manifestations of anti-Semitism. In meetings with government officials at both the national and local levels, the Ambassador continued to raise the issue of communal property restitution. Both in those meetings and in official correspondence, the Ambassador also urged government officials to increase their efforts to ensure the preservation of historic religious sites.

Embassy officials continued their meetings with internally displaced Muslims from Crimea to discuss their abuse by occupation authorities, including regular searches and detentions, a continuing inability to practice their religion freely or express dissent, a lack of restitution of their religious properties, and other continuing problems they faced with the Crimean occupation authorities.

The Ambassador and embassy officials hosted an interfaith iftar in June during Ramadan. Religious leaders from across faiths, government officials, and members of the diplomatic community attended. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also attended Hannukah, Christmas, and other religious events, as well as hosting a December holiday reception. They emphasized the importance

of religious dialogue and equality and encouraged efforts to combat anti-Semitism and preserve cultural heritage.

The Ambassador and embassy officials continued to urge the peaceful resolution of religious disputes concerning property in meetings with leaders of major Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious groups in Dnipro, Kyiv, Uman, and Lviv. In particular, the embassy continued to encourage religious groups involved in the dispute related to the location of parts of Lviv's Krakivskiy Market on the former site of the city's Old Jewish Cemetery to resolve the dispute peacefully. Embassy officials also discussed other issues affecting religious communities, such as registration procedures for religious groups, desecration of monuments, and the government's procedures for religious property restitution.

The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government, religious, and community leaders in April to encourage them to make greater efforts to promote Holocaust history education and to protect Holocaust memorials. In his meetings, he also emphasized the importance of preserving Jewish heritage sites.

CRIMEA

Executive Summary

In February 2014, armed forces of the Russian Federation seized and occupied Crimea. In March 2014, Russia announced Crimea had become part of the Russian Federation. A UN General Assembly resolution declared continued international recognition of Crimea's inclusion within Ukraine's international borders. The U.S. government continues not to recognize the purported annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and maintains Crimea continues to be part of Ukraine. Occupation forces continue their de facto implementation of the laws of the Russian Federation in the territory of Crimea.

The head of the Dzhankoy branch of Jehovah's Witnesses died of a heart attack following a court hearing on charges of conducting illegal missionary activities. Other Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, and Muslims faced charges for the same offense. According to human rights and international organizations, occupation authorities continued to subject Muslim Crimean Tatars to abductions, forced psychiatric hospitalizations, imprisonment, and detentions, especially if the authorities purportedly suspected the individuals of involvement in the Muslim political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. On August 31, Russian court bailiffs injured Archbishop Kliment, head of the Crimean Diocese of the UOC-KP, when they

raided the UOC-KP cathedral and diocesan administration office in Simferopol and seized parts of the property. The Russian government reported there were 812 religious communities registered in Crimea, a number that had dropped by over 1,000 since occupation began in 2014, the last year for which Ukrainian government figures were available. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), stringent Russian legal requirements continued to prevent or discourage groups from reregistering, while individuals who refused Russian citizenship remained unable under occupation law to register their communities. The OHCHR reported local authorities in June deregistered all 22 Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Crimea. The UGCC and the UOC-KP reported occupation authorities continued to make it difficult for them to operate in the territory. Local authorities reportedly told a Jehovah's Witness he would not be able to participate in alternative nonmilitary service unless he abandoned his religion.

Religious and human rights groups reported continued efforts by Russian media to create suspicion and fear among religious groups, accusing the Crimean Tatar community of links to Islamic groups designated by the Russian Federation as terrorists, and attempting to discredit the UOC-KP and the UGCC as "fascists." Crimean Tatars reported police continued to be slow to investigate attacks on Islamic religious properties or refused to investigate them at all.

The U.S. government continued to condemn the intimidation of Christian and Muslim religious groups by Russian occupation authorities in Crimea and to call international attention to the religious abuses committed by Russian forces. U.S. government officials remained unable to visit the peninsula following its occupation by the Russian Federation. Embassy officials, however, continued to meet in other parts of Ukraine with Crimean Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders to discuss their concerns over actions taken against their congregations by the occupation authorities, and to demonstrate continued U.S. support for their right to practice their religious beliefs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Crimean peninsula consists of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the city of Sevastopol. According to State Statistics Service of Ukraine estimates, the total population of the peninsula is 2,353,000. There are no recent independent surveys with data on the religious affiliation of the population, but media outlets estimate the number of Crimean Tatars, who are overwhelmingly Muslim, at 300,000, or 13 percent of the population.

According to the most recent information provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture in 2014, the UOC-MP remains the largest Christian denomination. Smaller Christian denominations include the UOC-KP, RCC, UAOC, UGCC, and Jehovah's Witnesses, along with Protestant groups, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Lutherans. Adherents of the UOC-MP, Protestants, and Muslims are the largest religious groups in Sevastopol.

There are several Jewish congregations, mostly in Sevastopol and Simferopol. Jewish groups estimate that between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish residents lived in Crimea before the Russian occupation began.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Pursuant to international recognition of the continued inclusion of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea within Ukraine's international borders, Crimea continues to be officially subject to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. In the aftermath of Russia's occupation, however, occupation authorities continue their de facto implementation of the laws of the Russian Federation in the territory.

Government Practices

Summary Paragraph: The head of the Dzhankoy branch of Jehovah's Witnesses died of a heart attack following a court hearing on charges of conducting illegal missionary activities. Other Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, and Muslims faced charges for the same offense. The occupation authorities continued to subject Muslim Crimean Tatars to abductions, forced psychiatric hospitalizations, imprisonment, and detentions, according to human rights and international organizations. Occupation authorities sentenced several Muslim Crimean Tatars to prison for alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir and detained dozens more throughout the year. According to the Russian Ministry of Justice, there were 812 registered religious communities in the region, more than 1,000 fewer than were registered under Ukrainian law in 2014, the last year for which figures were available from the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture. According to the OHCHR, stringent legal requirements under Russian legislation continued to prevent or discourage reregistration of many religious communities, while many religious minorities refusing Russian citizenship remained unable under occupation law to register their communities. The OHCHR reported local occupation authorities in

June deregistered all 22 Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Crimea. Greek Catholic leaders continued to have difficulty staffing their parishes because of the policies of the occupation. The UGCC reported it continued to have to operate under the umbrella of the RCC. The UOC-KP reported continued seizures of its churches and the injury of UOC-KP Archbishop Kliment on August 31 when Russian bailiffs raided the main UOC-KP cathedral in Simferopol in Russia-occupied Crimea and seized religious property. Local authorities reportedly told a Jehovah's Witness he could not participate in alternative nonmilitary service unless he abandoned his religion. Because religion and ethnicity were often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The investigation of Ervin Ibragimov's kidnapping continued with no new information on his whereabouts at year's end. In May 2016 unidentified uniformed men kidnapped Ibragimov, a Muslim and member of the Bakhchisarai Mejlis and of the Coordinating Council of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars, after stopping his car on the side of the road. In June Ibragimov's employment record book and passport were found near a bar in Bakhchisarai.

The NGO Crimean Human Rights Group reported the death of the head of the Dzhankoy branch of Jehovah's Witnesses, Vitaly Arsenyuk, by a heart attack on June 27 following a hearing before a "justice of the peace" on charges of "unlawfully conducting missionary activities."

On September 10, Akhtem Chiygoz, deputy head of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, was sentenced to eight years in jail in connection with what both the Ukrainian government and civil society organizations considered unfounded charges related to a demonstration that took place before Russia's occupation began. Both Chiygoz and Mejlis representative Ilmi Umerov were released October 25 following negotiations by the Turkish government. The details of their release were not publicly known.

Forced psychiatric examinations of Crimean Tatar Muslim prisoners continued throughout the year. For example, according to a human rights NGO, on January 12, occupation authorities forcibly subjected Zevri Abseitov, detained on charges of involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, a Muslim political organization outlawed in Russia but legal in Ukraine, to psychiatric evaluation and confinement without apparent medical need.

In late April a court in Rostov, Russia changed the verdict for Ruslan Zeyitullayev, replacing his six-year prison sentence with twelve-years' imprisonment on terrorism charges for his alleged involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir. In April, May, and July he held hunger strikes, demanding Russian authorities stop ethnically and religiously motivated persecution of Crimean Tatars. On July 27, Russia's Supreme Court rejected Zeyitullayev's appeal and increased his prison term to 15 years.

During an offsite hearing in Simferopol on December 4, Russia's Rostov District Military Court prolonged the detentions of Muslims Aliyev, Emir-Useyin Kuku, Vadym Siruk, Enver Bekirov, Arsen Dzheparov and Refat Alimov until May 2018. The court cited their suspected involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir in Yalta.

On October 11, police detained six Crimean Tatars – Timur Ibragimov, Marlen Asanov, Server Zekiryayev, Ernest Mametov, Seyran Saliyev, and Memet Belyalov – for their suspected involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bakhchisarai. The press quoted their lawyer, Mammet Mambetov, as stating that police had beaten some of them while they were in custody. According to media reports, on December 5 and 7, Simferopol's Kyivsky District Court extended their detention until March 2018. Russian media portrayed the Crimean Tatars detained on October 11 and subjected to searches in Bakhchisarai in January as “extremists.” The Crimean Tatar Resource Center, an NGO based in Kyiv, issued a statement following the October 11 arrests asserting such “systemic criminal acts” by the occupation authorities were an abuse of freedom of religion, were politically motivated, and “aimed at inciting ethnic and religious hatred.” Occupation authorities also detained another nine Crimean Tatars – Asan Ismailov, Amet Suleymanov, Eldar Ishnazarov, Ernest Ibragimov, Refat Asanov, Eskender Lyumanov, Ilnur Asanov, Rudem Nedjiev, and Ruslan Bilyalov – who were present at homes searched on October 11, and had tried to document and spread information about the searches. On October 12, the Bakhchisarai District Court imposed fines of 10,000 to 20,000 Russian rubles (\$170 to \$350) on each of the nine detainees for “organizing the simultaneous mass presence and movement of persons in public places, which caused violations of public order.”

Eight Crimean Tatars – Zevri Abseitov, Remzi Memetov, Rustem Abiltarov, Ayder Saledinov, Teymur Abdullayev, Uzair Abdullayev, Emil Dzhemadenov, and Rustem Ismailov – all detained by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in 2016 on suspicion of involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, remained in custody at year's end facing potential prison sentences of up to 10 years. According to media reports, on December 8, the Crimean Supreme Court extended the detention of

Saledinov, Dzhemadenov, Ismailov, and Teymur and Uzair Abdullayev until February 2018. In February Ismailov and Saledinov were reportedly forced to undergo psychiatric examination.

In October the NGO Memorial released its annual report, which included a list of political prisoners in Russia. The report named three Crimean political prisoners who continued to be imprisoned in Russia for their participation in Hizb ut-Tahrir. Yury Primov, Ferat Saifullayev, and Ruslan Zeitullayev were detained in Sevastopol in 2015 and charged with participation in or organizing activities for a terrorist group as designated by Russian law.

On August 31, Russian court bailiffs twisted the arm of Archbishop Kliment, head of the Crimean Diocese of the UOC-KP, when they raided the UOC-KP cathedral and diocesan administration office in Simferopol. The archbishop was transported by ambulance to hospital for treatment. The bailiffs cited a 2016 decision by Crimea's "arbitration court" to revoke a lease agreement for the property, evict the UOC-KP from the cathedral, and pay a fine of 500,000 Russian rubles (\$8,600). They restricted access to portions of the property and seized the cross, church utensils, icons, porcelain, and crystal tableware donated to the church, as well as carpets.

According to the OHCHR, following an April decision by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban Jehovah's Witnesses, local authorities deregistered all 22 Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Crimea on June 1. The OHCHR report stated the ban "affected the right to freedom of religion of an estimated 8,000 believers in the region."

Based on information provided by the Ministry of Justice of Russia, the OHCHR reported 722 religious communities were registered with the local authorities in Crimea and 96 in Sevastopol as of September 4. These included the two largest religious organizations – the Christian Orthodox UOC-MP and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (SAMC) – as well as various Protestant, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Greek Catholic communities, among other religious groups.

According to data collected by the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture in 2014 (the most recent year available), there were 2,083 religious organizations (a term including parishes, congregations, theological schools, monasteries, and other constituent parts of a church or religious group) in the ARC and 137 in Sevastopol. The numbers included organizations both with and without legal entity status. Muslim

religious organizations constituted the largest number of religious organizations in the ARC, most of which were affiliated with the SAMC, Ukraine's largest Muslim group.

The OHCHR report on the most recent number of registered religious communities indicated more than 1,000 religious communities recognized under Ukrainian law had not reregistered. According to the OHCHR, stringent legal requirements under Russian legislation continued to prevent or discourage reregistration of many religious communities. In addition, many members of religious minorities, especially Crimean Tatars and members of the UOC-KP, continued to refuse Russian citizenship and remained unable under occupation law to register a religious community.

According to human rights groups, the authorities continued to restrict the rights of Crimean Tatars, who are Muslim, following the 2016 designation of the Mejlis, recognized under Ukrainian law as the democratically elected representative council of the Crimean Tatars, as an "extremist organization."

Human rights groups reported the occupation authorities continued to require imams at Crimean Tatar mosques to inform them each time they transferred from one mosque to another.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, on April 2, police "stormed into" a Kingdom Hall in Dzhankoy during a prayer service and, citing the Russian Supreme Court's ban on Jehovah's Witnesses activity, searched the building and locked it to prevent future religious gatherings at the site. Occupation authorities continued to occupy the building at year's end.

According to Forum 18, an international religious freedom NGO, occupation authorities brought administrative charges against 13 individuals, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, and Muslims, for illegal "missionary activity," although some were attending religious meetings of the religious group to which they belonged. The punishments generally involved fines of approximately 10 days' wages, according to Forum 18. Occupation authorities brought an additional 14 cases against individuals and religious communities for failing to use the full legal name of a registered religious community.

On February 9, a "justice of the peace" of the Bakhchisarai District fined Arsen Ganiev for "missionary activity conducted at an unauthorized location" for

distributing calendars, leaflets, and a book about the forthcoming celebration of the Prophet Mohammed's birthday.

On February 18, a "justice of the peace" of Yalta District sentenced Hryhoriy Stasyuk, local leader of the Church of Christians of Seventh-day Adventists in Yalta. He was fined 30,000 Russian rubles (\$520) for the absence of a signboard with the full name of the organization at the entrance to the premises in which the church held its services.

On May 11, a "justice of the peace" of the Bakhchisarai District imposed a fine of 30,000 Russian rubles (\$520) on Nikolay Blyshchik, a pastor of the local evangelical Revival Church, for the absence of a signboard with the full name of the organization at the entrance to the premises where the church services were conducted.

The RCC reported it continued to operate in the territory as a pastoral district directly under the authority of the Vatican. The RCC stated it faced continued difficulty in staffing parishes, as occupation authorities continued to require its Polish and Ukrainian priests, the majority, to register as foreign residents. As such, the priests were permitted to stay in the territory for only 90 days at a time and then were required to remain out of Crimea for 90 days before returning.

According to the UGCC, it could still only operate as a part of the pastoral district of the RCC and was prohibited from operating independently.

According to the UOC-KP, Russian occupation authorities intensified pressure on the UOC-KP Crimean diocese in a bid to force the UOC-KP to leave the region. Only eight of the 15 UOC-KP churches located in Crimea prior to the Russian occupation remained functioning at the end of the year.

According to media reports, Russian authorities sanctioned the destruction of a historic Islamic cemetery in Gurzuf to prepare the site for construction of a children's camp building. The construction began in January and continued, although workers had unearthed human remains. In November Russian media reported that occupation authorities would give the site protected heritage status.

According to the All-Ukraine Union of Pentecostal Churches, occupation authorities in Bakhchisarai forced the local Pentecostal congregation Voice of Hope to move out of its building located opposite a newly built FSB facility.

Occupation authorities cited violations of construction standards. The congregation resumed worship in a different building.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia website, on June 9, officials of the Bakhchisarai District's Military Registration and Enlistment Office told a local Jehovah's Witness he would not be able to perform alternative nonmilitary service unless he abandoned his religion. The office reportedly served the conscript a summons requiring him to present documents showing his "change of faith" and warning him that authorities would prosecute him for rejecting their demand.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious and human rights groups continued to report Russian media efforts to create suspicion and fear among certain religious groups, especially targeting Crimean Tatar Muslims, whom media repeatedly accused of links to Islamist groups designated by Russia as terrorist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Russian media articles and commentary continued attempts to discredit the UOC-KP and the UGCC, depicting the groups as "fascists" for supporting the Ukrainian government and opposing the Russian occupation. For example, on June 4, the Russian news website Life.ru posted a lengthy analysis of the "history" of the UOC-KP, purportedly showing how "Nazi supporters" dominated the UOC-KP both in the past and in the present.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. government continued its efforts to focus international attention on the religious freedom-related abuses committed by Russian forces and occupation authorities in Crimea, especially on actions taken by those forces and authorities against Christians and Muslims. U.S. government and embassy officials condemned the continuing intimidation of minority religious congregations, including Christians and Muslim Crimean Tatars.

Although embassy and other U.S. government officials remained unable to visit Crimea following the Russian occupation, embassy officials continued to hold meetings in other parts of Ukraine with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders. They discussed their concerns over actions taken against congregations by the occupation authorities and reassured the religious leaders of continued U.S. support for the right of all to practice their religious beliefs. In meetings with U.S. officials on December 11 and 12, representatives from the UOC-KP, UOC-MP, Pentecostal Church, UGCC, Baptist Union, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, and

Muslim communities expressed concerns regarding continued harassment, intimidation, and property confiscation by occupation authorities. Embassy officials said the United States would continue to support religious freedom in the peninsula and press the occupation authorities to return confiscated property and release prisoners incarcerated for their religious or political beliefs.