

# HUNGARY 2018 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. In December parliament amended the law that had stripped hundreds of religious entities of their legal status. The amendment enters into force in April 2019; it establishes a four-tier system of churches and makes them eligible for donations from income tax and state funding. In May the Supreme Court ruled a 2017 government raid on the Church of Scientology (COS) headquarters was lawful; the government continued its criminal investigation of the COS. Jewish groups expressed concern that the House of Fates museum, which the government said it would open in 2019, would obscure the country’s role in the Holocaust. There were reports of senior government officials and politicians using anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic speech. Jewish groups expressed concern about praise by Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orban and other government officials for World War II (WWII)-era anti-Semites and Hitler allies and public messaging they said could incite anti-Semitism. PM Orban reiterated “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism.”

There were reports of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents, including assaults. Muslim leaders said anti-Muslim incidents were at approximately the same level as in 2017. The Action and Protection Foundation (TEV) a nongovernmental organization (NGO), recorded 32 anti-Semitic crimes, including three assaults, compared with 37 in 2017. A business magazine’s picture of an article about a prominent Jewish leader was condemned as anti-Semitic. A Jewish news outlet poll said two-thirds of Jews believed anti-Semitism in the country was a serious problem; 48 percent reported hearing anti-Semitic remarks in the preceding year. An Ipsos Mori poll reported 51 percent of residents believed a Muslim could never be a “true Hungarian.”

U.S. embassy and visiting U.S. government officials met with the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC) to discuss religious freedom, Holocaust commemoration, and heirless property restitution, and to urge the government to amend the religion law. U.S. officials expressed concern about government

officials' anti-Muslim rhetoric and the COS investigation. Embassy officials met a range of religious groups to discuss issues affecting them.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.8 million (July 2018 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 COS, Russian and other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, and Muslims. 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. According to estimates from the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish population numbers between 35,000 and 120,000 persons. The overwhelming majority of Jews live in Budapest, while 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.

In an administrative reorganization following parliamentary elections in April, the government transferred most responsibilities for religious affairs from the MHC to the PMO.

In the system valid through the end of the year, religious organizations could acquire incorporated church status through an application submitted to the office responsible for religious affairs in the PMO and, if found eligible, by a subsequent two-thirds vote of parliament. The religious group was then by law entered onto a list of incorporated churches. The PMO has 60 days following the initial application to assess whether the group fulfills all the administrative criteria, which included a variety of documentation and qualification requirements. To qualify for incorporated church status, a religious group must have existed as a religious organization in the country for 20 years, in which case it must have had a membership of 0.1 percent of the total population (approximately 10,000 persons) or been registered as a religious organization and have existed for at least 100 years internationally, in which case its foreign affiliation must have been certified by at least two other churches of “similar doctrine” recognized in foreign countries. Its activities must not have conflicted with the constitution or other laws or violate the rights and freedoms of other communities. A group must also have proven its primary purpose was to conduct religious activity; have a formal statement of faith and rites, bylaws and internal rules, and elected or appointed administrative and representative bodies; and officially declared its activities were not in violation of the laws or the freedom of others. The PMO was obligated to consult with a qualified lawyer, historian of religions, scholar of religions, or sociologist with an academic degree prior to issuing its decision. Applicants could appeal the PMO’s decision to the Budapest Public Administration and Labor Court and, ultimately, to the Curia, the country’s highest judicial authority.

Following a favorable PMO decision on the applicant’s eligibility, the PMO submitted the application to parliament’s Judiciary Committee, which had 60 days to invite the applicant to a public hearing and to submit an assessment to parliament on the group’s compliance with additional criteria. These criteria included an assessment that the group poses no threat to national security (provided by parliament’s National Security Committee), that it did not violate the right to physical and mental health or the protection of life and human dignity, and that the group was suitable for long-term cooperation with the state in promoting community goals based on its founding documents, number of members, network of institutions providing public services, and access by larger societal groups to such services.

Approval of a request for incorporated church status required a two-thirds majority vote by parliament, to take place within 60 days of a motion by parliament's Judiciary Committee. If a religious group received such parliamentary approval, the state was required to grant specific licenses to the group to support its participation in tasks to achieve community goals. If parliament rejected the application, a detailed explanation was required, and the applicant could challenge parliament's decision in the Constitutional Court within 15 days. The law did not prescribe any consequences if parliament did not act within the 60-day period, nor was there opportunity for appealing parliamentary inaction.

A 2011 law on religion automatically deregistered more than 300 religious groups and organizations that had had incorporated church status. Those organizations must reapply if they wish to regain incorporated church status. Their applications are also subject to the approval of a two-thirds majority of parliament.

The 2011 law listed 27 incorporated churches, including the Catholic Church, a variety 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, 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, bringing the total number on the registered list of incorporated churches to 32.

Incorporated churches have certain privileges not available to religious organizations, such as greater access to state funding and exemption from state oversight of their financial operations connected to religious activities. Incorporated churches and their associated institutions (classified as "internal religious legal entities") that provide public services, such as healthcare, education, or other social services, are automatically eligible for full state subsidies (a subsidy based on the number of persons receiving services coupled with a supplementary subsidy) for all their public service activities. Religious organizations may take over or establish public service institutions and receive a per capita state subsidy to cover the wages of the staff employed by these institutions. They may also apply for additional funding from an additional budgetary allocation.

The law authorized the Budapest Metropolitan Court to register a group as a religious organization if it had at least 10 founding individual members whose primary objective was to conduct religious activities that do not violate the

constitution, other laws, or the rights and freedom of other communities. The organization's membership could consist only of individuals; no "legal persons" such as corporations or other associations could be members. The court was required to approve applications meeting all of these criteria. Applicants had to submit the name and address of the organization, names and addresses of founding members, identifying information on the group's legal representative and the term of his or her appointment, the founding documents of the group, and a statement that the primary objective of the organization was to conduct religious activities. If the court rejected an organization's application, the decision was subject to appeal to the Budapest Metropolitan Court of Appeals.

By law taxpayers may allocate 1 percent of their personal income taxes to an NGO, including one affiliated with a religious organization or incorporated church, and could allocate an additional 1 percent to an incorporated church (but not to any other religious organization or NGO). The government matched the 1 percent funds that only incorporated churches were eligible to receive.

Both incorporated churches and NGOs affiliated with religious organizations were free to use taxpayer donations as they wished. Only officials of incorporated churches were exempt from personal income tax under certain conditions. Both religious organizations and incorporated churches were prohibited from purchasing agricultural land. Incorporated churches, but not religious organizations, could acquire new agricultural land as a gift or an inheritance. Agricultural land (as opposed to other land holdings) owned by a religious group deregistered in 2011 could be retained by the religious organization that is the deregistered group's legal successor.

If incorporated churches or religious organizations cease to exist (e.g., by dissolving themselves) and have no legal successor, their assets become state property that must be used to finance public services. This may also occur if, upon the initiative of the government, the Constitutional Court issues an opinion that the activity of the incorporated church violates the constitution, and parliament confirms the decision by a two-thirds majority vote. The Constitutional Court also issues opinions upon the request of the Budapest Metropolitan Court on whether a religious organization is in violation of the constitution.

Every registered (but not unregistered) religious community may use the word "church" in its official name regardless of whether it is officially recognized by parliament as an "incorporated church." Officials from both incorporated churches and registered religious organizations not recognized by parliament (but not

unregistered religious groups) are not obligated to disclose information shared with them in the course of their faith-related service, such as during rites of confession. Unregistered religious groups, since they lack legal status, may not purchase property in their name. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) reports that unregistered religious organizations enjoy protection for faith-related services.

On December 12, parliament enacted an amendment to the 2011 religion law, scheduled to enter into force on April 15, 2019, that will extend the existing two-tier system of “incorporated churches” and “religious organizations” into a four-tier system of registered religious entities, consisting of “incorporated churches,” “registered churches,” “listed churches,” and “religious associations.” The categories will be applicable to any religious group, not just Christian organizations. All four categories under the new law will have “legal personality,” giving them legal rights such as the right to own property. The amendment will eliminate the restriction that taxpayers may donate 1 percent of their tax liability only to incorporated churches and allows donations to all religious entities with legal personality. The amendment will also allow the government to negotiate individual agreements with all four categories of religious entities to fund their social service activities. The duration of these agreements will depend on the type of church status, ranging from a five-year maximum for religious associations to unlimited duration for incorporated churches. With the exception of religious associations, religious groups falling under one of these categories will be required to publish these agreements and publicly account for social service spending.

Under the new system, all currently incorporated churches will retain their status in the new system, and incorporation of new churches will still require a two-thirds approval by parliament. The Budapest-Capital Regional Court will rule on registration applications for the other three tiers. Religious association status will require a church to have at least 10 members. Listed church status will require that the church receive tax donations from 1,000 individuals on average over three years and have operated as a religious association for at least five years in the country or for at least 100 years internationally. Registered church status will require that the church receive tax donations from 4,000 individuals on average over five years and have operated as a religious association for at least 20 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally. Churches that agree they will not seek government or EU funding for their religious activities will be able to qualify as listed or registered churches without receiving individual donations. A religious entity will not be allowed to apply for any of the three categories if it is a criminal defendant, has been convicted of a crime during the previous five years, is under

sanction for “repeated violation of accounting and management rules,” or is considered a national security threat.

Religious entities that do not register will still be able to function and conduct worship, and the amendment specifies constitutional protections for freedom of religion apply to them as well as to those with legal personality.

By law, no state office may determine or supervise a registered religious community’s faith-based activities. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Their names, symbols, and rites are protected by copyright law, while buildings and cemeteries are protected by criminal law. Unregistered groups, according to HCLU, enjoy copyright and at least some other protections, but the law is unclear about the extent of those other protections.

The constitution establishes a unified system for the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsman). 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.

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 Church, Reformed Church, Lutheran Church, and Jewish congregations receive automatic authorization to provide chaplain services to the military. Other incorporated churches and religious organizations must seek permission.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion and provide them with special diets, such as kosher, vegetarian, and pork-free meals. All

incorporated churches and religious organizations must seek permission to offer pastoral services in prisons. Rejection of access requests may be appealed to the National Prison Service, the prosecutor's office, or the ombudsman. Detainees have the right to participate in communal religious services three times a week and to contact without supervision representatives of incorporated churches or religious organizations having permission to access the facility. Detainees in special security regimes may only receive individual spiritual care and are excluded from community spiritual programs. In the case of pretrial detainees, during the course of the criminal investigation, a public prosecutor or judge may restrict personal interaction with a religious representative but not participation in communal religious services.

Incorporated churches receive automatic authorization to provide pastoral services in hospitals, while religious organizations must seek permission.

One-hour-per-week faith-and-ethics or ethics-only education is mandatory through the first eight grades of public school. Students and their parents choose between the faith-and-ethics class provided by an incorporated church of their choice or a generic ethics course taught by public school teachers. Religious groups are entitled to provide their own teachers, prepare their own textbooks, and determine curricula for their faith-and-ethics classes. Private schools are not required to introduce faith-and-ethics or ethics classes. Unincorporated religious organizations 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 if requested by students or parents.

Incorporated churches and religious organizations have the right to open their own schools. For incorporated churches and religious organizations operating their own schools, the state provides a subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, for employee wages, but only incorporated churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for the schools' operating expenses. According to the law, religious organizations may apply to the MHC for a supplementary operational subsidy covering approximately 30 percent of their total costs for schools, and the MHC decides on a case-by-case basis whether to grant it.

The law also affords incorporated churches and religious organizations the right to assume operation of public schools through a formal agreement with the PMO. In these cases, the government continues to fund the schools. Religious communities, school teachers, the affected parents, or the operator of the school may initiate such transfers, but only if the designated religious community is able to collect the

signatures of more than 50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school. 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 includes a prohibition of “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. Abusing an individual because of his or her religious affiliation is punishable by up to three years in prison.

Physical assault motivated by the victim’s actual or suspected 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 similarly punished 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 arrow cross in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of victims a misdemeanor, punishable by detention for a period ranging from five to 90 days.

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**

As in previous years, parliament failed to vote on any of the 14 applications by religious groups which the MHC had previously found eligible for incorporated church status, despite the 60-day legal deadline for action after a ministerial referral and a December 2017 Constitutional Court ruling that parliament's failure to act within the 60-day legal deadline for action violated the constitution. The explanatory notes to the December 12 amendment to the religion law, which the government is expected to use as a guide in implementing the amendment, state that those religious groups will be given preferential consideration for (the lesser) listed or registered church status.

In a case involving the MET's home for the elderly, the Constitutional Court ruled October 5 that parliament had violated the constitution by failing to act on MET's 2014 pending application for incorporated church status. The Constitutional Court ruled parliament should fulfill its legislative duty and vote on the application by the end of the year; parliament did not comply, although the new amendment provided a procedure for the MET and other churches to regain a lesser status. MET representatives said its shelters for homeless, elderly, and refugees, hospital, schools, and other social services should be eligible for the same support the state gave to similar activities conducted by incorporated churches. The government rejected this argument. The Constitutional Court did not rule on the issue of funding of MET's home or other social services, but only that parliament should vote on the group's application for incorporated status. The Constitutional Court issued a similar ruling on December 20, 2017, ordering parliament to vote on MET's application, but parliament failed to act by that ruling's March 31 deadline.

In May the Supreme Court overturned the February decision of the Buda Central District Court of Budapest that the National Bureau of Investigation's (NBI) 2017 raid of the COS headquarters and seizure of its materials was unlawful. The Supreme Court ruled the seizure did not violate the principle of proportionality and did not obstruct the free practice of religion. The NBI raid followed the initiation of an investigation of the COS by the government's Data Protection Authority (DPA) and a DPA complaint against the COS alleging criminal abuse of personal data. The government recognized the COS as a religious organization. The government's investigation of the COS was continuing at year's end, but the government did not provide any information on the status of the case.

The COS's appeal of the denial of a certificate of occupancy for its headquarters and eviction order issued by Budapest's 13th District remained pending at year's end. According to the COS, courts blocked the eviction order until the Supreme Court could decide the appeal.

The government continued its public campaign of billboards and posters against a Jewish, Hungarian-born, U.S. citizen businessman. Some of the placards stated the businessman wanted to settle migrants from the Middle East and Africa in the country. In May PM Orban demanded “respect” from Jewish leaders and blamed the same businessman and his NGO for growing European anti-Semitism.

In April online news service *Index.hu* and daily newspaper *Nepszava* reported that in the previous eight years the government had transferred 34 buildings to churches in a nontransparent manner. The report stated the buildings were not properties seized under the Communist regime and had not previously belonged to the religious groups to which they were given.

Prominent national and international Jewish groups expressed concern about the September 7 announcement that in 2019 the government would open the House of Fates, a Holocaust museum and education center in Budapest focusing on the efforts of non-Jewish Hungarians to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. The government had put the museum on hold in 2014 due to intense opposition from national and international groups. These organizations criticized the project as an attempt to obscure the involvement of the country and WWII Regent Miklos Horthy in the Holocaust. According to a September 21 statement by Israeli Holocaust Museum Yad Vashem, the House of Fates museum’s plans ignored the country’s anti-Jewish laws during that era and gave the false impression that, “except for a tiny, criminal and fanatic minority, the citizens of Hungary were essentially blameless.” On September 27, World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder expressed disappointment that the House of Fates museum concept “ignored the role played by Hungarian society and its authorities in the annihilation of Hungarian Jewry.”

There were reports of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic rhetoric by government officials and politicians, including at the highest levels. For example, a January interview in the German newspaper *Bild* quoted PM Orban as saying most migrants should not be considered refugees but “Muslim invaders.” In a March 15 speech, PM Orban said, “We must fight against an opponent which is different...they are not honorable, but unprincipled; they are not national, but international; they do not believe in work, but speculate with money; they have no homeland, but feel that the whole world is theirs.” Media outlets such as the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *The Times of Israel*, and *The Guardian* reported these comments as referring to Jews.

In November private television broadcaster Hir TV made public a recording it said it had obtained of opposition Jobbik party MP Istvan Szavay talking to a fellow party member at Jobbik's electoral congress about "knocking out" a woman he presumed to be Jewish at a downtown club in August. Szavay said the woman recognized him and said, "I feel Nazi stench here." Szavay said he called her a "filthy Jew," punched her in the face, and "slightly twisted her schnozzle." On December 3, Szavay announced he would give up his parliamentary seat.

Jewish groups expressed concerns about praise by government officials, including PM Orban, for the country's WWII-era anti-Semites and Hitler allies as well as about public messaging they said could incite anti-Semitism. On September 2, the Fidesz (governing party)-administered village of Kenderes held a Horthy Memorial Day. Fidesz MP Sandor Kovacs stated at the event it was thanks to Regent Horthy and others that the country managed to survive after World War I. The Director of the government-funded Veritas Research Institute, Sandor Szakaly, said anti-Jewish laws signed by Horthy did not deprive Jews of their rights but only limited them, and that, despite these limitations, the lives of Jews in the country were safe until the Nazi occupation in 1944. He added that Horthy did not need rehabilitation because he was never convicted of any crime.

On July 16, state television broadcaster MTVA appointed Beatrix Siklosi to run its cultural channel M5. When Siklosi previously was nominated as chief editor of religious programming for national public television in 2014, media reported she had made racist and anti-Semitic comments on social media. The Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish communities published a letter stating Siklosi was unacceptable to them. Siklosi resigned from the religious programming position due to the protests but remained in charge of nationalities programming. TEV sent a letter asking the MTVA leadership and Media Council to reconsider her appointment.

In March Fidesz Party members of the local municipality and progovernment media criticized the opening of a Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC) cultural center and prayer house in 2017. In addition, media reported that, prior to the April parliamentary elections, Fidesz Party call centers told voters opposition Jobbik Party leader Gabor Vona "prays to Allah," referring to an undated video where he spoke to Turkish students and referred to God as "Allah."

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary (OMH) cited the government's anti-migration and anti-Muslim rhetoric as the biggest challenges Muslims had to face in the country. It also said Muslims faced indirect administrative barriers when

trying to obtain building permits for mosques, open or expand Muslim cemeteries, or buy or rent land or homes. HIC and OMH leaders said lack of sufficient cemetery space for Muslims was one of the most pressing problems for the Muslim community.

On July 19, PM Orban visited Israel and met with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu. After their meeting, Orban stated Jews could feel safe in Hungary and that his government had zero tolerance for anti-Semitic statements.

According to a major survey of Jews in the country, issued in December by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 74 percent of Jews found anti-Semitism to be a problem in political life. Eighty-three percent said the government was ineffective in combating anti-Semitism, and 55 percent assessed the government's efforts to respond to the security needs of Jewish communities were inadequate.

The government provided 118.1 billion forints (\$421.53 million) to incorporated churches during the year, of which 96.7 percent went to what the government and media called the country's four "historical" religious groups: the Catholic Church, which received 94.2 billion forints (\$336.22 million); Hungarian Reformed Church, 13.7 billion forints (\$48.9 million); Lutheran Church, 3 billion forints (\$10.71 million); and the Jewish community, consisting of Mazsihisz, 2.6 billion forints (\$9.28 million), the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation, 304.4 million forints (\$1.09 million), and the Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community, 227 million forints (\$810,000 million). According to the government, more than 94 percent of citizens who reported a religious affiliation were affiliated with the four historical religious groups.

These four religious groups and the other incorporated churches that received the balance of the government's contribution used the funds for a range of activities, including maintenance of buildings, support for religious instruction and culture, support for community programs and investments, and employee wages. Government support for incorporated churches also included funding to a dozen churches for renovating their buildings. The government allocated additional funding from other budget accounts for churches providing public educational and social services and for registered religious organizations, but data on the extent of this support were unavailable.

According to press reports, on October 3, the government distributed 2.76 billion forints (\$9.85 million) from the annual budget for religious community programs.

On December 23, the government awarded an additional 21 billion forints (\$74.95 million) to some incorporated churches and religious organizations.

Some incorporated churches continued to express concern that, if they spoke out on issues of public importance, the government would withdraw some of its financial support, which in many cases constituted two-thirds or more of the churches' total funding.

According to tax authorities tracking the 1 percent tax allocations designated to incorporated churches, 988,000 citizens donated their 1 percent personal income tax to one of the incorporated churches during the year. Similarly to previous years, the church bodies receiving the most donations were the Catholic, with 526,339 persons contributing 2.5 billion forints (\$8.92 million); Reformed, 209,109 persons contributing 996.8 million forints (\$3.56 million); and Lutheran, 60,036 persons contributing 308 million forints (\$1.1 million). The Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness ranked fourth, with 46,198 persons contributing 250 million forints (\$892,000). Effective January 1, tax declarations did not have to be submitted by individuals on a yearly basis but remained valid until the taxpayer changed them.

According to the PMO, of elementary and secondary schools, 15 percent were operated by incorporated churches (compared with 14.3 percent in 2016-17) and 0.1 percent by religious organizations in the 2017-18 school year. Of preschools (ages 3-7), 7.5 percent were operated by incorporated churches (7.2 percent in the previous year) and 0.1 percent by religious organizations. There were 214,243 students studying at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by registered religious communities (incorporated churches and religious organizations), compared with 207,600 in the previous school year. Approximately half of these students were in schools operated by the Catholic Church.

According to the PMO, religious entities provided government-funded social services to 116,440 persons and child protection services to 10,506 persons during the year (27.2 percent by the Catholic, 24.2 percent by the Reformed, and 21.3 percent by the Hungarian Pentecostal Church).

The government made statements in defense of a Christian Europe and operated a dedicated state secretariat within the PMO to assist persecuted Christian communities throughout the world, including with financial assistance. In his annual state of the nation speech in February, PM Orban stated the West "opened

the way for the decline of Christian culture and...Islamic expansion,” while his government “prevented the Islamic world from flooding us from the South.” On November 13, Deputy PM Zsolt Semjen said it was striking that Europe’s Christian civilization was in danger again, not from the Ottoman Empire, but from the threat of Islamization.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Budapest on October 8-9 and, with PM Orbán, attended the opening ceremony of the renovated tomb of Gul Baba. Baba was a Muslim dervish and member of the Bektashi order, who died in Budapest in 1541 and whose burial place became a pilgrimage site for Muslims. The government cofinanced the renovation with the government of Turkey.

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

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

The government did not publish statistics on religiously motivated crimes or other incidents. According to its annual report, TEV registered 32 anti-Semitic hate crimes, compared with 37 in the previous year. These were 19 cases of hate speech (24 in 2017), 10 of vandalism (13 in 2017), three of assault (one in 2017), and none of threats (none in 2017). Muslim organizations did not collect statistical data and said many members did not bother to report incidents because they did not believe doing so would lead to any effective action by authorities. Muslim leaders stated they believed anti-Muslim incidents remained at approximately the same level as in 2017.

On April 5, according to TEV, a man struck a Canadian rabbi without warning and knocked off his kippah at a store in a Budapest shopping mall. On June 13, TEV reported a Budapest bus driver said he “wished gas to the Jews” when someone asked him for directions to a synagogue. In April a Facebook user shared a photograph of a Budapest bus stop defaced with the text, “death on ... Jews.”

The November 29 edition of weekly business magazine *Figyelo* stated Mazsihisz could not account for funds the government had allocated to the organization for a new museum. The issue’s cover showed András Heisler, Mazsihisz President and World Jewish Congress Vice President, surrounded by money. Its lead article stated that, while Heisler criticized other proposed museums (such as the House of Fates) for not disclosing details of their planned exhibits, he had so far failed to publish the concept of his own government-funded project, the House of Coexistence.

In a published statement, Mazsihisz condemned the *Figyelo* article and cover as an incitement against a religious leader unprecedented since the country's transition to democracy in 1990, adding that they “revived centuries-old stereotypes against our community.” According to Israeli press reports, the Israeli PM’s diplomatic adviser raised concerns over the issue with the Hungarian Ambassador to Israel and called on the Hungarian government to condemn the magazine’s anti-Semitism. The American Jewish Committee called the *Figyelo* piece an “anti-Semitic attack.” *Figyelo* rejected the criticism and, in response to a statement supporting Heisler by the Israeli Ambassador to Hungary, stated, “This form of diplomatic pressure ... constitutes a violation of the freedom of the press and of Hungarian sovereignty.” World Jewish Congress President Lauder said the cover “is one of the oldest and vilest caricatures of the Jewish people and it places not just the magazine, but all of Hungary in a very bad light.”

In January the Association of Christian Intellectuals organized a Mass to be held in a downtown Budapest Catholic church to commemorate former Regent Horthy’s 150th birthday on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day – five months before his actual birthday on June 18. Fidesz MP and Deputy Speaker of Parliament Sandor Lezsak, former PM Peter Boross, and Veritas Institute Director Szakaly were scheduled to attend and speak at the Mass. The Catholic Church canceled the event following intense domestic and international criticism. Mazsihisz President Heisler publicly opposed the Mass and stated in an open letter addressed to Lezsak that his official participation “tramples on the memory of all the Hungarian victims.” In 2017, Heisler raised concerns about Horthy for what he said was his responsibility for the deaths of 600,000 Jews and tens of thousands of soldiers and the era of anti-Semitism associated with his name. The Miklos Horthy Association then organized a small service in honor of Horthy on February 11 in the Homecoming Reformed Church, where Horthy’s bust is also placed.

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary reported that early in the year an older woman used her walking stick to strike a middle-aged woman wearing a headscarf. The two women engaged in an altercation, but neither pressed charges. The organization reported several incidents in which individuals verbally insulted members of their community, mostly women and girls wearing headscarves on streets or in schools by shouting “Allahu akbar” at them or telling them to “go back to Africa.” The organization also said that on several occasions unknown persons sprayed litter bins and mobile toilets in the neighborhood of the ongoing renovations of its headquarters with the texts, “Allah,” “Muhammad,” and “migrant.”

In December the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) released its second survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism. EU-FRA targeted Jewish populations through community organizations, Jewish media, and social networks; 590 individuals who identified themselves as Jewish residents of Hungary responded to the online survey. Twenty-seven percent said they had witnessed other Jews being physically attacked, insulted, or harassed in the previous 12 months, and 23 percent reported being harassed over the same period. Eight percent of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because of their religion or belief; 71 percent thought anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

According to a survey published in June by the country’s leading Jewish news outlet, *Szombat*, two-thirds of Jews believed anti-Semitism in the country was a serious problem, and 48 percent of respondents reported hearing anti-Semitic remarks in the preceding year.

In a poll of residents of the country by UK-based market research company Ipsos MORI published in June, 51 percent agreed a Muslim could never be a “true Hungarian” and 59 percent said immigrants could not be regarded as Hungarians, even if they were legal residents or had lived most of their lives in the country. A poll of residents by think tank Political Capital found almost half said Muslims were stealthily trying to enforce their culture, and 45 percent believed Muslim leaders had a secret plan to capture Europe and transform it into an Arab continent. According to a Pew Research Center poll of residents published in October, 21 and 57 percent, respectively, said they would accept a Muslim or a Jew as a member of their family.

A 2017 survey the Median Public Opinion and Market Research Institute conducted for TEV, found approximately 37 percent of the population (33 percent in 2016) held anti-Semitic views.

In June online news site *888.hu* published an article about what it called the negative influence of the six million Muslims in France. The same article announced a new column, “the White Man,” with a stated aim of drawing attention to the threats Islam posed to Western society and civilization. Ahead of the April parliamentary elections, media widely described as government-friendly (online sites *origo.hu*, *pestisracok.hu*, and *ripost.hu*) ran stories calling opposition party Jobbik prime ministerial candidate Gabor Vona a closet Muslim.

During a soccer match between the country's Ferencvaros club and Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv in July, former Ferencvaros player and club coach Istvan Toth was honored by the club, Mazsihisz, and the World Jewish Congress. In 1944, Toth saved hundreds of Jews as a member of the Hungarian anti-fascist resistance. Nazi collaborators executed him in 1945.

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

In meetings with government officials, including in the PMO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and the MHC, U.S. embassy representatives continued to advocate religious freedom and discussed Holocaust commemoration, provisions of the religion law that resulted in discrimination against minority religious groups, the House of Fates, and the COS investigation.

The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom visited the country in November and, accompanied by embassy officials, met with Prime Minister Orbán, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, other government officials, and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom.

The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues visited the country in June and, accompanied by embassy representatives, met with officials at the PMO and MFAT, representatives of Jewish communities, the Holocaust Memorial Center, and Jewish cultural organizations. The Special Envoy encouraged government officials to agree on a timetable to conclude negotiations on the value of now-heirless property seized from Jews during the Holocaust and to consider another interim payment to Holocaust survivors while these negotiations were ongoing.

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 Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the COS, and with 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-Islamic rhetoric.

In February and June senior embassy representatives hosted interfaith breakfasts to discuss religious freedom and the importance of interfaith dialogue with Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Jewish, Muslim, Baptist, and MET leaders.

Senior embassy officers attended seders in March, and the Ambassador and a senior embassy officer attended Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in September held by various Jewish congregations. At all these events, the embassy representatives reiterated U.S. government support for religious freedom and discussed issues of concern to the Jewish community.

In April an embassy officer spoke about the lives of the Reverends Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr., and their messages rejecting intolerance and prejudice at an event organized by the Hungarian Baptist Church. Government officials and leaders of other churches attended the event.

In June an embassy official attended and delivered a welcome speech at the “Empty Desks” conference organized by the Jewish cultural organization Mazsike and the Holocaust Memorial Center. The project commemorated pupils killed during the Holocaust. The speech focused on the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, solidarity, and universal human rights.

In August the Ambassador delivered a speech emphasizing the importance of religious tolerance at a commemoration of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Nazi occupation of the country in 1944.