



Hungary

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. However, friction between the Government and religious organizations over recent laws affecting the funding of church-run public art collections as well as educational and social institutions continued during the reporting period.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, along with substantial media attention to the subject, which suggests an increase of anti-Semitic rhetoric in a climate of political friction and economic uncertainty.

The U.S. Government continued to discuss religious freedom with the Government and with all elements of society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 35,919 square miles and a population of 10.1 million.

Data on religious affiliation is regarded as sensitive information and may not be officially recorded. However, the 2001 national census, the latest survey available, included an optional question on religious affiliation, to which 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the replies, the population is 55 percent Roman Catholic, 15 percent Reformed, 3 percent Lutheran, and less than 1 percent Jewish. These four are the country's "historical" religious groups. In addition, 3 percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent declared no religious affiliation. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include the Congregation of Faith, a broad range of other Christian groups, five Orthodox religious groups, seven Buddhist groups, and three Islamic communities.

Data protection regulations impeded the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys suggest that citizens were less devout than the average central European. According to a 2004 survey by the Economic Research Institute of Hungary, 58 percent of respondents declared themselves to be "believers," and 55 percent responded that they believe in "God or the supernatural." Fifteen percent of believers declared that they attended religious services at least once a week, and 25 percent stated that they never did.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution provides for free choice or acceptance of a religion or other conscientious convictions, the freedom for everyone to practice or to abstain from practicing, and the right to exercise or to teach their religion and beliefs in public or in private, either individually or together with others, through religious acts and ceremonies or in other ways.

The Constitution separates church and state. The state should remain neutral in matters concerning ideology; however, the state has a duty to ensure the possibility of freely forming personal convictions. Citizens also have the right to sue the Government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The Criminal Code has a provision on the "Violation of the Freedom of Conscience and Religion," which states that whoever restricts another person by violence or threats, or prevents another person from freely exercising his religion by violence or by threats, commits a crime, which is punishable by imprisonment extending to 3 years. If a person abuses someone because of his affiliation with a religious group, the crime is punishable by imprisonment of 5 years.

There is no state religion, and under the law every registered religious group is entitled to the same rights. The four "historical" religious groups (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish) receive 93 percent of state financial support provided to religious groups. Traditional groups also receive tax breaks.

Relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church are regulated by the 1990, 1994, and 1997 Vatican treaties. These agreements also serve as a framework for regulating state relations with other religious groups. During the period covered by this report, a governmental arbitration committee and the Holy See negotiated a modification of the Vatican Treaty Regime. Both sides agreed that the 1997 Treaty should be updated due to structural and administrative changes in public life, but they also believed the general context would not be altered.

The Government observes Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

The state operated the army chaplain service for the four historical religious groups that had members of a significant number in the army. Free exercise of religion (not only in private but also in public) in the military is ensured for every denomination. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain service. During the reporting period, the Roman Catholic Church and the Government renegotiated the 1994 treaty that regulates military chaplain services. The renegotiation was based on recent fundamental changes in the military structure, such as the abolishment of conscription and the increasing number of international missions in which the military participates. The Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services in prisons.

The 1990 Act on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities of, and the benefits enjoyed by, religious communities; it also establishes the criteria for legal designation. The county courts implement the registration of churches. The requirements are highly formal: the church must be founded by 100 private individuals and must have a charter and elected organs of administration and representation. The court determines whether the new group complies with constitutional and legal requirements; if so, the court cannot reject the registration request. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration grants rights, imposes obligations on operating educational and social institutions, and provides access to several forms of state funding. All registered churches have the same rights and obligations. In 2007 six new religious groups were registered, including the Budapest Unitarian Church, the Greek Founded Orthodox Church, the Organization of Kolping Education and Social Institute, the Wesley Church Alliance, Khyenkong Karma Tharjay Buddhist Congregation, and the Church of Journey and Morality Community. A total of 361 churches were registered by the end of the reporting period.

Churches have the right to provide religious education in public schools on demand of the students or the parents. Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools, but the Government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes. Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and is taught in school facilities by representatives of various religious groups. While the Government makes provisions for minority religious groups to engage in religious education in public schools, the four "historical" groups provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. Non-public schools are not obliged to ensure religious education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period covered by this report.

Citizens may donate 1 percent of their income to the religious group of their choice and receive a tax exemption. This applies to every legally registered religious group. In addition to taxpayer contributions, the Government allocates public funds to registered religious groups. The Government supplements taxpayer contributions to registered groups in proportion to individual contributions by an additional 0.9 percent of total tax income. In 2007 this supplementary funding amounted to \$67.6 million (HUF 10.8 billion), while it increased to \$74 million (HUF 11.9 billion) in 2008. Further funding is provided for a range of activities, such as the maintenance of public art collections, reconstruction and renovation of religious institutions, support for religious instruction, compensation for non-restituted religious property, and assistance to church personnel serving the smallest villages. In 2007 this amounted to nearly \$91.7 million (HUF 14.7 billion), while it decreased to \$91 million (HUF 14.6 billion) in 2008. The Government also provided financial support for church-run social services and schools. In 2007 this support amounted to an estimated \$398 million (HUF 63.7 billion). In 2008 the Government introduced a new form of financial support for churches providing educational and cultural services, which target the social integration of the Roma minority. In 2008 this form of support amounts to an estimated \$312,000 (HUF 50 million).

Educational and social institutions, such as schools and old-age homes, maintained by legally registered religious groups are entitled under the law to receive the same public support as institutions maintained by the state or municipalities. State financial subsidy to various churches for educational and social services continued to be a source of contention in church-state relations. On June 3, 2007, the State Audit Office released an official report concluding that in 2005 and 2006 the government withheld \$17,178,220 (HUF 2.7 billion) of subsidies from schools operated by religious organizations. The Reformed Church announced their intention to turn to the Constitutional Court, claiming that the state did not meet its church subsidy obligations under the law. The Catholic Church had not announced its decision in response to the State Audit Office report by the end of the reporting period. The Minister of Education and Culture stated that there was no exact method to calculate supplementary funding to church-run schools but indicated that a government decree would be issued soon. The historic religious groups expressed opposition to resolving this issue via executive decree rather than parliamentary law.

Leaders of the churches continued to complain that state financing for the maintenance of public art collections and other public services that the churches provide was delayed and severely reduced. Many church-run art collections were closed during the last 3 years due to the lack of state financial support.

In April 2006 three opposition politicians submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Court alleging that the 2006 budget discriminated against church-run public services with respect to central budget financing and thus violated the 1997 Vatican treaty. The court had not ruled on the case by the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2005 the Government adopted a resolution making it possible to fast-track property restitution negotiations and close outstanding claims in 2006 instead of by 2011 as the original law set forth. Three religious groups (Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Budai Serb Orthodox) chose to use the new procedure; neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran churches opted for the procedure. Until the end of the reporting period, 2,502 properties (worth up to \$623 million or HUF 100 billion) were restituted, and \$418 million (HUF 67 billion) was paid as compensation. The Catholic, Protestant, and Lutheran churches had 196 outstanding cases (\$23.5 million or HUF 3.7 billion) at the end of the reporting period. Participants generally considered the procedure satisfactory. Members of the Jewish community viewed the restitution process as generally fair but wanted to see compensation paid for the estimated \$2.3 to \$18.6 billion (HUF 430 billion to 3.44 trillion) worth of heirless Jewish properties specifically excluded from the restitution process. On November 27, 2007, the Government issued a resolution to set up a joint commission, which includes representatives of the Government and the Jewish communities, to agree on the financial compensation for heirless Jewish properties. The agreement was concluded according to which the Government agreed to transfer \$21 million (HUF 3.4 million) in 5 years to the Jewish Heritage of Hungary Public Endowment (MAZSOK). In December 2007, \$12.6 million (HUF 2.3 million) was transferred to the account of MAZSOK. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) will spend the subsidy to benefit Holocaust survivors.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government and politicians from all parliamentary parties continued their strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by speaking out against right-wing extremists and social intolerance. Contacts across the political spectrum reported an increased risk of extremism--including anti-Semitic sentiments and actions--as political friction and economic uncertainty continued.

On June 22, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany and Chairman of the main opposition party Fidesz Viktor Orbán both met the visiting Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel Yona Metzger. They discussed issues of concern to the Hungarian Jewish community such as education, diversity, and the threat of anti-Semitism. Metzger arrived to open a new wing of a Budapest synagogue, making it the first extension to a synagogue in Budapest since the Holocaust.

In June, a multiparty delegation of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee paid a 4-day official visit to Israel. The delegation discussed religious tolerance with high level state officials and met with Hungarian Israelis dual nationals.

On May 14-15, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany paid an official visit to Israel and attended ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel.

On May 1, Minister of Defense Imre Szekeres along with Israeli ambassador Aliza Bin-Noun and U.S. ambassador April H. Foley joined the Walk for Life pilgrimage covering the 3kilometers between the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps to pay homage to the six million victims of the Holocaust.

On April 16, the official Holocaust Remembrance Day in Hungary, government and opposition politicians jointly paid tribute to Hungarian victims of the Holocaust at commemorations held at various places in Budapest. As in previous years, approximately 5,000 persons, including ministers and parliamentarians from every party, participated in the "March of the Living" torchlight procession.

On February 28, President Laszlo Solyom and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Zoltan Lomnici attended the "Righteous Among the Nations" award ceremony organized by the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Institute. In his speech, President Solyom paid tribute to the victims of the Holocaust and those who saved them.

On February 18, Parliament passed an amendment to the Penal Code, initiated by the senior governing Socialist Party, making hate speech punishable by law. The bill specifies that anyone who uses inflammatory expressions about specific ethnic groups or "offends their human dignity" may be punished by a maximum two-year prison term. However, the bill was not supported by the junior governing Free Democrats, the opposition parties, and some members of the Government. President Solyom, who considered the bill unconstitutional, forwarded it to the Constitutional Court for a preliminary review. Domestic human rights groups agreed with President Solyom that the amendment restricts freedom of speech. Religious groups, particularly the Jewish community, disagreed. The case was pending at the Constitutional Court at the end of the reporting period.

On January 27, various public figures attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp at the Holocaust Documentation Center.

Restitution cases under Act XLVII remained pending. The Act, which took effect in March 2006, was extended until January 2007 to allow compensation claims from those individuals whose immediate relatives were killed

in the Holocaust or in Soviet forced labor camps, or lost their lives between 1939 and 1989 due to politically motivated despotic action of the Hungarian authorities, as well as from those who performed forced labor due to racial, religious, or political reasons during World War II. The Jewish communities welcomed the Government's decision and noted that Hungary is the only country that offers compensation in this manner. Eligible individuals may apply for a lump sum worth up to \$2,581 (HUF 400,000) for each spouse, parent, or child and a lump sum worth \$1,290 (HUF 200,000) for each sibling who was killed and compensation notes or monthly life annuity for forced labor. During this period more than 97,600 claims from 60 countries were submitted to the Central Judiciary Agency. By the end of June 2008, 37,200 decisions were issued and \$7.6 million (HUF 1.181 billion) was transferred to the eligible applicants.

During the period covered by this report, the cooperation between the Hungarian authorities and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), in regard to access to the Holocaust era archives was satisfactory. The USHMM received several microfilm collections from both the National Archives of Hungary (MOL) and the Budapest Municipal Archives, in connection with its historical research of the Holocaust in Hungary. The USHMM successfully negotiated the amendment of its Cooperation Agreement with the Historical Archives of the Hungarian National Security Services (ABTL), and the second phase of cooperation between the USHMM and ABTL commenced. During his visit in Hungary, USHMM Chief Archivist Henry Mayer received permission to view the collection of compensation and restitution records held in the Ministry of Finance, which will soon become part of the USHMM's microfilming project. Lajos Geccsenyi, Director General of MOL and head of the Prime Minister's Office's archives related working group, visited the USHMM to discuss future cooperation.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Jewish community representatives reported that there had been an increase in anti-Semitism compared to 2006, particularly in the form of severe verbal assaults during anti-Government demonstrations. [MAZSIHISZ](#) associated the increase with anti-Semitic groups playing on the widespread discontent over the country's economic difficulties. Politicians and the media also gave considerable attention to the problem of anti-Semitism. On May 8, the *International Herald Tribune* quoted Janos Ladanyi, a Hungarian sociologist, who stated that "in Hungary it is all right today if you behave as a religious Jew. But what is now being denied here is the notion that Jews, no matter how we behave, are the same as non-Jews." In the same article, Hungarian historian Tibor Frank commented "the Jewish issue is part of a larger reassessment of our history." Political analyst Agoston Mraz noted that "while I myself don't believe there is such a clear increase in anti-Semitism, there is now the opportunity to be more explicit about it."

On April 1, far-right groups attacked a downtown ticket office after a reported dispute between an employee of the shop and a customer who wanted to buy a ticket for a band favored by the far-right. On April 7 and 11, far-right "flash-mobs" were confronted by anti-fascist demonstrations at the ticket office, with the 300 to 400 counter-demonstrators heavily outnumbering the 40 right-wing protestors. The Prime Minister and visiting former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder participated in the counter-demonstrations, along with various members of the parliamentary parties. President Solymosi also visited the ticket agency and expressed support for the anti-fascist demonstration. On April 16, Budapest Mayor Gabor Demszky recalled in his speech at the March of the Living commemoration that "left and right wing, liberal and conservative, socialist, Fidesz, and MDF local government politicians were face to face for the first time with the fascist provocateurs who threaten minorities and the democracy. ... This was a crucial turning point in terms of mobilizing the peaceful anti-fascist people."

On March 18, an openly anti-Semitic op-ed was published in *Magyar Hirlap* (MH), a conservative mainstream national daily. The author Zsolt Bayer said in the article that "back in 1967 the Jewish journalists of Budapest were vilifying Israel. Today the same Jewish journalists of Budapest are vilifying the Arabs and [main opposition] Fidesz, and us all. Because they hate us more than we hate them ... their mere existence justifies anti-Semitism." The appearance of a photo on the Fidesz website of Bayer with Fidesz party leader Viktor Orban at a subsequent unrelated event also compounded the controversy. Leading officials of parliamentary parties condemned the article, along with Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights Zoltan Balog of the Fidesz opposition party who described it as "inexcusable and indefensible." The SZDSZ party called for a boycott of MH and terminated its subscription. Bayer responded to the harsh reactions to his article by commenting, "They need not be afraid of me. It is not me they should be afraid of," and emphasized that he should have said it is not the existence of Jews that warrants anti-Semitism, but the actions and words of many Jews. On March 28, MH owner Gabor Széles published his opinion in which he claimed that the piece

may have been offensive but the public has a right to express opinions and this piece can be a starting point for debate. On April 9, chief editor of MH Mihaly L. Kocsis wrote that it was a mistake to publish the Bayer article and that the Chairman of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee Zoltan Balog was right when he called the article unacceptable and indefensible. As of July 1, Kocsis has been replaced by a new chief editor, Istvan Stefka.

On November 16, Miklos Dory (member of the MSZP local faction) opined at a meeting of the Budapest 13 district's city council that Gyorgy Szabo (an Israeli-Hungarian dual citizen and member of the local faction of Fidesz) did not understand the government program since "he spent too much time in Israel." Dory also suggested that if Szabo did not feel comfortable in Hungary, he could easily leave the country. Fidesz and SZDSZ both described the remarks as openly anti-Semitic and called on MSZP to dismiss Dory from the party. MSZP refused the accusations of anti-Semitism and did not dismiss Dory from the party.

On September 10, Christian Democrat Party (KDNP) Chairman Zsolt Semjen addressed the Hungarian Jewish people in Parliament and asked them whether they "benefit if a bad policy pushes Uncle Schwartz and Aunt Weisz as hostages before itself?" His political opponents and various media outlets criticized Semjen, who rejected the accusations and claimed that his words were intentionally misunderstood by the Government politicians. Semjen launched a libel suit against a *Napi Gazdasag* journalist who branded him an anti-Semite.

On August 28, a well-known Hungarian blogger openly expressed anti-Semitic views while appearing as a guest on the morning talk show of TV2, one of the country's two main commercial television channels. The management of the channel apologized and promised to be more careful in selecting future invitees.

The formation of the Magyar Garda at the end of summer 2007 caused serious anxiety within the Jewish and Roma communities during the reporting period. The induction of the first 56 "guards," wearing uniforms decorated with a symbol associated with the country's World War II fascist regime, led to protests against the Magyar Garda sponsored by the Nagy Imre Society, the Hungarian Anti-Fascist League, and others. During the induction ceremony, the flag of the Garda was blessed by a Catholic priest, a Lutheran pastor, and a Calvinist preacher. Both the Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Hungarian Calvinist Church claimed that the clerics did not represent their respective denominations, and the Lutheran Church launched an inquiry into the participation of the Lutheran pastor. Leaders of the World and European Jewish Congresses, along with MAZSIHISZ, asked the Prime Minister to ensure that the Magyar Garda did not threaten Hungarian Jews. Bloomberg News reported that 56 Magyar Garda members marched in polished combat boots and black uniforms to Budapest's presidential palace and raised their right hands in a salute to defend the country from "bloodsuckers." The article noted that neo-Nazi marchers took an oath of allegiance in a ceremony that evoked "images of the Hungarian fascists who flew the same banner in the 1930s."

On September 5, Fidesz Chairman Viktor Orban condemned the creation of Magyar Garda, hate speech, and the politics of hatred at a meeting with ambassadors. In August, Orban and Fidesz Caucus Leader Tibor Navracsics wrote a letter to the World Jewish Congress saying they would defend the human rights and civil liberties of all Hungarian Jews. On August 31, 2007, a five party press conference designed to demonstrate multi-partisan consensus against the Magyar Garda deteriorated into a dispute over whether some parties were accepting the support of anti-Semitic elements or manipulating the issue for political advantage.

A case in the Budapest court system regarding the legality of the Magyar Garda's formation was still pending.

The weekly newspaper *Magyar Demokrata* continued to publish anti-Semitic articles, as did the more radical weekly *Magyar Forum*. There were numerous far-right websites in the country, many of which were openly anti-Semitic. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the Government monitored the websites for content, because by law public display of symbols such as the swastika, hammer and sickle, and red star is prohibited.

During 2007, according to police, there were 287 reports of vandalism or destruction of Jewish and Christian properties (37 in houses of worship and 250 in cemeteries), as compared to 387 reported cases in 2006. Police and religious authorities claimed that the incidents were acts of youthful vandalism and not manifestations of religious intolerance. These cases include a May 2, 2008 incident in which two teenage boys admitted to vandalizing the Jewish cemetery in Kaposvar, painting swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on two

dozen graves. In April 2008 police arrested two persons in their 20's for breaking into a synagogue in Mád in northeast Hungary. The burglars caused significant damage to the building and its contents--including the inner walls of the main sanctuary--while looking for cash and valuables. On April 4, 2008, a large swastika was drawn at the main Buda synagogue. The wall of a Catholic church in Budapest was repeatedly vandalized with red paint and dirt during the spring. In September 2007 unknown vandals sprayed anti-Semitic slogans on a mobile Holocaust memorial exhibition just outside Budapest, according to press reports. Police from the small town of Godollo said that the target was a train carriage that has been on display throughout the country since April 2006.

In June, a Lutheran priest was harassed and beaten by three young men in Sopron following a 24-hour Bible reading ceremony.

On December 7, three middle-aged men were arrested for disturbing the peace during a Hanukkah candle lighting ceremony in Budapest. The three men were part of a sparsely attended demonstration held close to where the ceremony was held. They carried posters and flags reminiscent of Hungary's Nazi past and attempted to prevent the ceremony from being held by using loudspeakers and sirens. Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany denounced the demonstration. The police released the arrested men several hours later.

In October, some protestors marking the 51st anniversary of the 1956 uprising against the Soviet Union in Budapest chanted anti-Semitic slogans against Israel.

Investigation of war crimes charges against Sandor Kepiro continued throughout the reporting period. Kepiro was convicted by a Hungarian court in 1944 and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for his role in the January 1942 Novi Sad massacre in Serbia, in which more than 1,000 were killed, mostly Jews. His punishment was never carried out after the Nazis occupied Hungary in March 1944, and he fled to Argentina after World War II. He was convicted again in absentia by the Communist regime in 1946. He returned to Hungary in 1996 and was discovered living in Budapest by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center in September 2006, which called for his immediate punishment. On March 1, 2007, the Budapest District Court ruled that the 1944 conviction and sentence could not be carried out because the records attesting the verdict had been irretrievably lost. The Budapest Investigative Prosecutor's Office began a new case investigation on March 6, 2007. On August 13, 2007 Hungary presented a legal assistance request to the Ministry of Justice of the Serb Republic regarding the case, and the investigation was temporarily suspended pending receipt of the response. On May 13, 2008, the Serbian authorities responded with a report that a Serbian investigative judge conducted a hearing with six witnesses, but none was able to identify Kepiro from a photograph after so much time had elapsed. The Serbian authorities offered Hungarian officials the opportunity to research the Serbian and Montenegrin archives related to the case. On May 28, 2008, the Prosecutor's Office ordered the continuation of the investigation and indicated they may send a follow-up legal assistance request to research the Serbian archives.

Following a journalist's lawsuit in February 2007, the Budapest Municipal Court ruled that the state security archives could legally release secret documents on six religious leaders (three Roman Catholic bishops, a retired Lutheran bishop, a former Lutheran national supervisor, and the executive director of MAZSIHISZ). The journalist was investigating whether they had cooperated with communist-era secret services. The court's decision indicated that all six were public figures because they could influence public opinion. On March 27, 2007, the three Catholic bishops filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. The case was not closed by the end of the reporting period.

Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize regular events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, which brings together religious academics for discussions. Religious groups also demonstrated strong willingness to work together across a wide range of other areas to achieve common social or political goals. On April 18, 2008, the leaders of the four "historic" religious groups held a joint press conference to condemn far-right thinking. They also agreed that as of April 2009, they would commemorate the Hungarian victims of the Holocaust every year within their respective communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government raised the problem of anti-Semitic public incidents organized by extreme-right groups

with the Government, not only as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, but also to demonstrate the increased attention and commitment to halt these recent phenomena.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with Members of Parliament, political party leadership, and representatives of local and international NGOs that address issues of religious freedom. Embassy officers closely tracked anti-Semitic incidents and regularly consulted with leaders of religious groups in order to assess the threat.

The Embassy continued to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech and urged all parties to do the same. The U.S. Ambassador attended events organized by the Jewish communities in Hungary, including the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Institute Righteous Among Nations Award Ceremony on February 28; the April 16 "March of the Living" torchlight procession and the Holocaust remembrance concert at the House of Terror Museum; and the April 17 opening of the "Freedom of Revolt" Photo Exhibit at the Jewish Museum. The Ambassador attended a memorial event at Auschwitz with the Defense Minister on May 1. The Ambassador visited a new Holocaust Memorial in Balf and talked to local audience on the importance of tolerance on June 17. The Embassy maintained an active agenda of events with Roma community as well, underscoring the importance of tolerance for all minorities. On May 23, political analyst group Budapest Analysis noted the Embassy's efforts to combat intolerance through public diplomacy and private engagement.

In addition to vigorous diplomatic engagement with Hungary's public and political leadership, in March the embassy facilitated a visit by The U.S. State Department's Special Envoy to Combat and Monitor Anti-Semitism, who met with government officials, members of the parliamentary parties, and leaders of religious groups. In November 2007 the embassy coordinated the visit of an Anti-Defamation League (ADL) delegation, which met with the Foreign Minister, along with the Jewish community, to promote greater Holocaust education efforts and recognition of Hungary's role in the Holocaust.

In October 2007, the Embassy facilitated meetings between Rabbi Schneier of New York and Hungarian leaders to discuss anti-Semitism in Hungary. The Embassy arranged a follow-up meeting between Rabbi Schneier and Fidesz President Viktor Orban in New York City.

The Embassy has long cautioned that the prolonged state of economic uncertainty and political antipathy could provide the environment necessary to increase the appeal of extreme "solutions." To their credit, the parliamentary parties have been able to marshal a rare display of unity in denouncing the recent actions of the far-right.

The Embassy facilitated the transfer of Holocaust-era records to the USHMM and continued to lobby the Government at the highest levels for greater archival access for the museum. The Embassy also remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims. Embassy officers worked with MAZSIHISZ, other local and international Jewish organizations, Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office on restitution issues and to promote fair compensation.

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