



## Slovenia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

**October 26, 2009**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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.

There were isolated reports of minor societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles and a population of 2 million. According to the 2002 census, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 2 percent is Muslim, and 2 percent is Orthodox Christian. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include evangelical Protestants, "other Christians," "other Protestants," "Oriental" religions, "other religions," agnostics, and Jews. In addition, 3 percent of the population is classified as "believers but belonging to no religion," and 10 percent as "unbelievers/atheists"; 16 percent gave no reply in the census, and 7 percent are classified as "unknown."

The Orthodox and Muslim populations generally correspond to the immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively.

#### Section II. Status of Government Respect for 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 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion as well as inciting religious discrimination and inflaming religious hatred and intolerance.

The Religious Freedoms Act, which entered into force in 2007, codifies the Government's respect for religious freedom, legal status and rights of churches and other religious communities, rights of members, process of registration with the Government, rights of registered churches and religious communities, and responsibilities of the Government's Office for Religious Communities. The National Council (the upper house of Parliament) challenged the constitutionality of the act shortly after it came into force. At the end of the reporting period, the Constitutional Court was reviewing the act's constitutionality.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Sunday and Monday, Pentecost, the Assumption, Christmas, and Reformation Day. Members of religious communities whose important religious festivities do not coincide with those work-free days have the right to use their regular annual leave on their holy days.

The Constitution and military law provide for conscientious objection to military service based on "religious, philosophical, or humanitarian belief."

There are no formal requirements for recognition of religious groups by the Government, and activities of religious communities are unrestricted regardless of whether they register with the Government. However, religious communities must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, a status that entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. According to the Religious Freedoms Act, religious communities must have at least one hundred adult members and must have operated in the country for at least 10 years to register. Religious communities must submit a basic application to the Office for Religious Communities providing proof that these two requirements are met as well as the names of the community's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the community's religious beliefs, and the organizational act of the church or community. Religious communities registered under the previous law were automatically registered under the new law. The Office for Religious Communities did not receive any new applications during the reporting period.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the social insurance contribution for clergy and other full-time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The Religious Freedoms Act directs the Government to pay social insurance contributions for one religious employee per one thousand members of a recognized religious community.

At state-licensed schools, lessons with the goal of educating children in a particular religion are forbidden, as are prayer meetings. The Government partially finances teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools. Licensed schools may not display religious symbols, but students are permitted to wear religious symbols. At unlicensed private religious schools, religious lessons generally are mandatory.

The Government finances small grants for recognized religious organizations.

Individuals can file informal complaints of human rights violations, including violations of religious freedom, by national or local authorities with the Human Rights Ombudsman.

#### 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.

Muslim community leaders expressed concern that their community continued to be unable to provide adequate religious services in hospitals. Although the Ministry of Health adopted regulations on spiritual/religious service in hospitals in October 2008, by the end of the reporting period, the Ministry had not approved the Islamic Community's five candidates to provide religious services and counseling to hospitalized Muslims.

The Islamic Community and city officials made some progress towards the establishment of a mosque and Islamic cultural center in Ljubljana. The Islamic Community completed the purchase of land for the mosque on December 31, 2008. In April 2009 Ljubljana's mayor promised that the city would pay half of planning expenses for construction, and the Islamic Community expected to complete architectural plans by September 2009, with construction to begin shortly thereafter. The mayor rejected a January 2009 attempt by a city council member to

require a referendum on the mosque. The city council member appealed the decision to the Administrative Court, which rejected the appeal in June 2009.

By March 2008 the Government had adjudicated 1,006 (84.5 percent) of 1,191 Catholic denationalization claims for properties--church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests--that were nationalized after World War II. Catholic claims were only a small portion of the total number of denationalization claims (39,642), of which by July 2008 the Government had settled 38,584 (97.3 percent).

At the end of the reporting period, there had been no restitution of Jewish communal and heirless properties confiscated or nationalized during and after World War II. In 2007, acting on a tender awarded by the Ministry of Justice, the Institute of Contemporary History researched a report on such properties. Also in 2007 the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) funded a separate report that was researched by two experts affiliated with the Institute for Ethnic Studies. The Ministry of Justice stated that the Institute of Contemporary History finished its report in spring 2008 but would not publish or translate it into English until the WJRO had completed its own report. At the end of the reporting period, neither report had been published. The Ministry of Justice, the WJRO, and the Jewish Community of Slovenia planned to discuss restitution after both reports were complete.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On January 27, 2009, the Government observed its first Holocaust Remembrance Day.

On September 7, 2008, the Jewish community, supported by local government officials, held the third annual European Day of Jewish Culture festival, which the President attended and which received broad media coverage.

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

There were isolated reports of minor societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Interfaith relations were generally amicable, although there was little warmth between the Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that it viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

In November 2008 vandals defaced graves located in the mountains of the northwestern region; the graves contained the remains of Muslim soldiers, mostly Bosnians, who fought in World War I. The vandals spray-painted symbols of Serbian nationalism on the traditional Muslim wooden grave markers.

Jewish community representatives reported some prejudice, ignorance, false stereotypes, and negative images of Jews within society.

The Government promoted tolerance and antibias education through its programs in primary and secondary schools and made the Holocaust a mandatory topic in the primary and secondary contemporary history curriculum.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization and restitution of heirless and communal Jewish properties confiscated or nationalized after World War II. In addition, the Embassy made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. Embassy representatives met with members of all major religious communities and concerned government officials to discuss religious freedom. The Embassy also provided a small amount of financial support to the European Day of Jewish Culture.