



## Slovenia

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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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.

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 were classified as "unknown."

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

#### 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 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion as well as inciting religious discrimination and inflaming religious hatred and intolerance.*

A new Religious Freedoms Act entered into force in March 2007, replacing the 1976 law on religious communities. The law codifies the Government's respect for religious freedom, the legal status and rights of churches and other religious communities, the rights of church members, the process of registration with the Government, the rights of registered churches and religious communities, and the responsibilities of the Government's Office for Religious Communities. The National Council (the upper house of Parliament) challenged the constitutionality of the Religious Freedoms Act shortly after it came into force. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Constitutional Court was reviewing the act's constitutionality.

*The Government observes six Christian holy days--Easter Sunday and Monday, Pentecost, the Assumption, Christmas, and Reformation Day--as national holidays. 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. Religious communities must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, which entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. According to the new Religious Freedoms Act, religious communities must have at least 100 members and must have operated in the country for at least 10 years to register. 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 new Religious Freedoms Act directs the Government to pay social insurance contributions for 1 religious employee per 1,000 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. Licensed schools may not display religious symbols. Students are permitted to wear religious symbols. At unlicensed private religious schools, religious lessons generally are mandatory. *The Government partially finances teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools.*

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 period covered by this report.

Muslim community leaders expressed concern that their community continued to be unable to provide adequate religious services in hospitals. They noted that the Ministry of Health had not approved five religious representatives nominated by the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia to provide religious services and counseling to hospitalized Muslims. At the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Health reported that it was preparing regulations to facilitate the provision of religious services in hospitals by all religious communities.

The Islamic community and city officials made some progress towards the establishment of a mosque and Islamic cultural center in Ljubljana. A letter of intent signed in May 2007 by city officials and representatives of the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia projected final sale of the land for the construction by November 2007, but delays in the completion of a draft spatial plan postponed the purchase. On June 30, 2008, the city council gave initial approval to the draft plan for the mosque and opened the plan for public comment for 30 days. The final sale of the land was expected to take place by the end of July 2008; construction of the mosque was to begin in 2009 or 2010.

By March 31, 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 (39,633), of which by December 2007 the Government had settled 38,262 (96.5 percent).

At the end of the period covered by this report, 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

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

On February 14, 2008, the Government passed a decree proclaiming January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

On September 2, 2007, the Jewish community, supported by local government officials, held the second annual European Day of Jewish Culture festival, which was attended by the country's president and received broad media coverage.

On July 9, 2007, the Minister of Justice, who is the chair of the governmental Commission for Religious Communities, and Mufti Nedžad Grabus of the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia signed an agreement that acknowledges the Islamic community as an integral part of society, more clearly defines the areas of the Islamic community's activities, and facilitates the implementation of its programs. It also reaffirms the right of the Islamic community to establish its own media and educational institutions, preserve its historical and cultural heritage, and conduct religious services in hospitals and for army and police forces; in addition, it recognizes that Islamic charities are on an equal footing with other charities.

### **Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination**

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 were viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

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.

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