



Bosnia and Herzegovina

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The State Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the entity constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS) provide for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoy this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they are adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of religions in largely ethnically homogenous areas where they are in a small minority have had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The 2004 state-level Law on Religious Freedom also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities.

Overall, government respect for religious freedom did not change during the reporting period. The Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Serb Orthodox religious communities reported a significant number of attacks on religious objects. A number of illegally constructed religious objects continued to cause ethnic/religious tension and conflict in a number of communities. Religious communities continued to support and advocate refugee returns for their respective constituencies; however, the number of returns significantly declined during the reporting period. The return process suffered from a lack of funding for reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, local governments' inability or unwillingness to provide necessary services to allow for sustainable returns, and a lack of employment opportunities. The State Law on Religious Freedom protecting the rights of religious communities and creating a government registry allowing them to establish legal status was being implemented at the end of the reporting period.

Religious intolerance in the country directly reflected ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with one's religious background. Bosniaks generally were associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. The Jewish community maintained a very small but important presence in Bosnian society. There were also several small Christian denominations throughout the country. Despite the constitutional and legal provisions protecting religious freedom, discrimination against religious minorities occurred in virtually all parts of the country. In some communities, local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feeling through public statements and on occasion in sermons. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation. The U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo supported the religious communities in their efforts to receive restitution of property nationalized by the communist government of the former Yugoslavia after World War II. The embassy also assisted small Christian communities in obtaining legal registration of their churches in BiH.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country's territory is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a separate administrative district in Brcko (Brcko District). The country has an area of 31,816 square miles. In 2004, the World Bank estimated that the population was 3.9 million, although a reliable census has not been conducted since 1991. Reliable statistics on the precise membership of different religious groups remained unavailable.

According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constituted 40 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent. Many persons who identified with a major ethno-religious group were atheists or agnostics who did not regularly practice any religion. The small Jewish community had approximately 1,000 believers and maintained a special place in society by virtue of its long history of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities. There were also foreign missionaries who preached fundamentalist forms of Islam that tended to be intolerant of other religions and other forms of Islam. There were some reports that Muslims were offered economic incentives to worship and/or dress in a way that was different from traditional Bosnian Muslim custom.

The rate of religious observance remained relatively low among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance did exist, for example among Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region. For many Bosnian Muslims, religion often served as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice was confined to occasional visits to the mosque or significant rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death. Nevertheless, religious leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities claimed that all forms of observance were increasing among young people as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage, in large part due to the national religious revival that occurred as a result of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. Younger believers who grew up in the post-communist period also had more freedom to practice their religions and more access to religious education. Leaders from the three main religious communities observed that they enjoyed greater support from their believers in rural areas of Bosnia than from those in urban centers such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992-1995 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. Increased levels of returns, which peaked in 2002, continued to slow significantly in 2005-2006, leaving the majority of

Serb Orthodox adherents living in the RS and the majority of Muslims and Catholics in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remained. However, returns of Serb Orthodox adherents and Muslims in recent years to their prewar homes in western Bosnia and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia shifted the ethno-religious composition in both areas. For example, the prewar population of the eastern RS town of Bratunac was 64 percent Bosniak. In 1995, the population was almost completely Serb. In 2006, after the return of 6,500 Bosniaks, the population was 38 percent Bosniak. Similarly, in Prijedor municipality in the RS, about half of the prewar Bosniak population of 49,500 returned, partially reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing. Returns of Catholics to central Bosnia also took place in smaller numbers.

There were eight muftis located in major municipalities across the country: Sarajevo, Bihać, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The more conservative Islamic communities in Bosnia were located in the Federation in towns such as Travnik, Bocinja/Zavidovici, Tesanj, Maglaj, Bugojno, and Zenica. The Catholic community maintained its Bishops' Conference as an overarching organizational and regional structure, with bishops residing in Mostar, Banja Luka, and Sarajevo; the Franciscan order maintained its strongest presence in central Bosnia near Sarajevo and in Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox Church maintained its greatest influence in the RS, with the most influential bishops residing in Banja Luka, Trebinje and Bijeljina. The small Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia including Protestants, had its strongest support in Sarajevo.

Missionary activity was limited but growing, and included a small number of representatives from the following organizations, some of which had their central offices for the region in Zagreb or another European city outside of the country: Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna Consciousness, and the Baptist Church.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoyed this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they were adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in areas where one group represented an overwhelming majority had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The constitutions of both entities also provide for freedom of religion.

The State Constitution safeguards the rights of the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats), and by extension the three largest religious communities, by providing proportional representation for each group in the Government and in the military. As a result of the government structure created by the Dayton agreement, which ended the Bosnian conflict in 1995, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples." These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" and sympathizers of certain faiths who do not fit neatly into these three groups. For example, the country has a three-member joint presidency composed of one representative chosen specifically from each of the three major ethnic groups, with a chairmanship that rotates every eight months. As an attempt to address this lack of opportunity for members of other religious faiths, the president of the Jewish community—again, by virtue of the Jewish community's general impartiality in the political arena—was by common consensus accorded the leadership of the important Civil Service Agency, which is tasked with selecting civil servants for government posts based on merit.

Bosnia's state-level Government does not officially recognize any religious holidays. During the reporting period, Parliament failed to agree on a state law on national holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognized religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government and public offices closed on those days. Locally observed holy days included Orthodox Easter and Christmas in the RS, Catholic Easter and Christmas in Herzegovina, and Kurban Bajram and Ramadan Bajram in Sarajevo and central Bosnia.

The State Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and provides for the right to freedom of conscience and religion in Bosnia. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The law also creates a unified register for all religions within the Bosnian Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting every violation of religious freedom.

According to the provisions of the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may form a new church or religious community with a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice will issue a decision within thirty days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law, which came into force in March 2004, allows minority religions in the country to register legally and to operate without unwarranted restrictions. By the end of the reporting period, all small religious communities that applied to the Ministry of Justice were successfully registered.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group. Some political parties claimed to be multiethnic. Some clerics characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of "true" religious practice. Some religious leaders were also significantly involved in politics, becoming increasingly vocal during the pre-election campaign period and during the public debate over whether Parliament should adopt changes to the Bosnian constitution. For example, in June 2006, the Serb Orthodox bishop in Trebinje signed a petition calling for a referendum on whether the RS should be "independent" from BiH. Also in June, Cardinal Puljic made public statements in which he stated that the hostile attitude of local Muslims contributed to the low numbers of Bosnian Croat returns. In a lecture in June 2006, Reis Ceric compared recent meetings between Catholic and Orthodox officials without the presence of Muslim representatives to the 1991 meetings between former Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević at which they discussed the potential partition of BiH. Bosnia was scheduled to hold general elections in October 2006.

The lines dividing politics, ethnic identity, and religion were often blurred, particularly during pre-election periods, when religious sermons and

services were sometimes misused for campaigning purposes. Many political party leaders were former communists who manipulated the core attributes of their particular ethnic group, including religion, to strengthen their credibility with voters. For example, offices of local Bosnian Serb mayors in the RS were often decorated with religious icons, although few officials practiced religion in any meaningful sense.

During the reporting period, the entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four major religious communities. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority. Religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. In 2005, the international community encouraged the state-level Ministry for Civil Affairs (MCA) to take a coordinating role in developing education policy. However, the understaffed MCA education department failed to take an active role in creating a national education policy. Cantonal governments in the Federation, the entity Government in the RS, and Brcko District have responsibility for education policy. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with the exception of Brcko, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the area's majority religion. In theory, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) have the option to choose not to attend these classes. However, in practice, students of the majority religion and sometimes also of minority religions face pressure from teachers and peers to attend the classes. For example, the RS requires Serbs to attend Orthodox religion classes but does not require attendance for Bosniaks and Croats. However, Bosniak and Croat students often attend these classes anyway because they are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates. If a sufficient number of students of minority religion(s) attend a particular school (twenty in the RS, fifteen in the Federation), the school is required to organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas, there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to the handful of minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it logistically difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation's five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a two-hour per week elective course. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the "elective" one-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools.

Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Mostar, and Bihac, Muslim students may attend madrassahs. These Islamic secondary schools provide training for students who want to become religious officials, as well as general education to prepare students for university studies. There is one Serb Orthodox secondary school in Foca. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Zepce, Banja Luka and Zenica, students may attend Catholic school centers. Although primarily Croat, these schools are open to students of other ethnicities and faiths. These centers have both primary and secondary schools, and although the principals are priests, the majority of teachers are not religious officials. The curriculum is identical to the curriculum applied in schools in areas with a majority Croat population.

Facilities also existed for the three largest religious communities at the university level. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences was located in Sarajevo, the Serb Orthodox Seminary was in Foca in the RS, and two Catholic theology faculties (one run by the Franciscans and one run by the Diocese) were located in Sarajevo.

The State Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various churches or religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia. However, by the end of the reporting period, this provision of the Law on Religious Freedom had not been fully implemented. Its implementation is difficult in Bosnia's often-segregated school systems, particularly where there is political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level.

The country's four traditional religious communities all had extensive claims for restitution of property that the communist government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II. The State Law on Religious Freedom provides religious communities the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout the country "in accordance with the law." However, as of mid-2006, there was no state-level law on restitution, and both entity governments deferred any real attempt to resolve the issue. The State Commission for Restitution was working on drafting a state restitution law. In the absence of state legislation, return of former religious properties continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials. For example, the municipal government of Banja Luka returned the building that housed the newly reopened Catholic school to the Catholic Church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases, local governments and police made improvements in protecting religious freedoms, although serious problems remained, including an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom occurred. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of attacks against religious buildings, officials, or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles were responsible for these attacks.

Deputies being sworn into the RS National Assembly could choose either a religious oath consistent with their religious tradition or a nonreligious civil oath. Deputies to the state and federation parliaments took nonreligious civil oaths.

The State Constitution provides for proportional representation for each of the three major ethnic groups in the Government and the military. Because of the close identification of ethnicity with religious background, this principal of ethnic parity in effect reserved certain positions in Government and the military for adherents or sympathizers of certain faiths. The military in the RS was staffed overwhelmingly by ethnic Serbs and had only Serb Orthodox chaplains. The Federation military was composed of separate Bosniak and Croat units, as well as integrated units, and has both Muslim and Catholic chaplains. During the reporting period, both entities passed legislation that created a unified, state-level Ministry of Defense and Bosnian Army. The Ministry of Defense planned to develop an integrated professional chaplain corps.

In early post-war years, RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild some of the 618 mosques and 129 churches in the RS that were destroyed or significantly damaged during the 1992-1995 war. The most recent such

incident was in 2001 when a violent protest disrupted the laying of the cornerstone for the reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka. Local police also subsequently failed to conduct a serious investigation into most of these incidents. In Zvornik, a past source of conflict between the Islamic community and the local government was eliminated when the municipal assembly allocated land for a new mosque to be built. By the end of the reporting period, construction had not yet begun.

During the reporting period, the municipality of Travnik in the Federation partially complied with a 2003 decision by the Human Rights Chamber (now the Human Rights Commission of the Constitutional Court) ordering the municipal government to relocate a public school housed in a building formerly owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The municipality returned half the building to the Archdiocese for use as part of its Catholic school center. However, the other half remained in use as a public school. The court ordered the public school to move out of the building by July 1, 2006, but this would not be possible as the local authorities had not constructed a new public school building. At the end of the reporting period, negotiations on a timeline for the full return of the building continued.

In the absence of a law governing property restitution, municipal and cantonal authorities have broad discretion regarding disposition of contested property nationalized under the communist government of the former Yugoslavia. Many officials used property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities. Other unresolved restitution claims were politically and legally complicated. For example, the Serb Orthodox Church was seeking the return of the building which housed the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state parliament building was located. The Jewish and Muslim communities also had claims to substantial portions of what was prime Sarajevo commercial real estate. The Catholic community had a large number of potential claims in Banja Luka.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The RS and Federation Governments, local governments, and police forces frequently allowed an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom could take place. Reported attacks on religious buildings, officials, and minority believers remained frequent during the reporting period. The misuse of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. The absence of a police force willing to protect religious minorities, and of a judicial system willing to prosecute crimes against those minorities, posed major obstacles to safeguarding minority rights. While new officers continued to be accepted into the police academies under strictly observed ethnic quotas, the goal of establishing effective, professional, multiethnic police forces throughout the country would take years of concentrated effort. Administrative and financial obstacles to rebuilding religious structures impeded the ability of religious minorities to worship freely and contributed to the slow return of minority refugees in many areas.

A significant number of citizens remained internally displaced or refugees abroad following the 1992-1995 war. Virtually all had fled areas where their ethno-religious community had been in the minority or had ended up in the minority as a result of the war. Both organized and spontaneous returns peaked in 2002, and they continued to fall sharply in 2005-2006.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or government-owned land. In these cases, the buildings or monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethno-religious group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation. Three significant cases remained unresolved during the reporting period: the presence of a Serb Orthodox Church on the property of a Bosnian Muslim woman in the RS town of Konjevic Polje, despite the absence of local Serb residents; the presence of a Serb Orthodox church, again in the absence of Orthodox believers, in the middle of a majority Islamic community in the RS town of Divic; and the presence of a large stone cross and cement foundations for the stations of the cross in the ethnically divided town of Stolac in Herzegovina. In August 2005, local authorities in a Catholic-majority area ordered the destruction of the mosque in Jasenica on the grounds that the mosque had been built illegally. The Mostar mufti protested this decision, arguing that the mosque existed before the war and therefore the Islamic community was reconstructing a preexisting religious object. The issue remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

Although former Foca Mayor Nedeljko Pavlovic and Gorazde Mufti Hamed Efendic agreed to the reconstruction of a Muslim religious facility in Foca in 2003, a notoriously hard-line Serb municipality in the RS, reconstruction had not begun by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2004, the former Federation minister of spatial planning ordered the removal of the Stolac stone cross and cross foundations, and after a number of delays in response to political and religious sensitivities, a lawsuit was filed in April 2005 which prevented the implementation of the removal order pending a ruling by the Constitutional Court. The lawsuit remained unresolved during the reporting period.

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.

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism against the small Jewish community in the country were relatively infrequent. In December 2005, a local television station with limited viewership broadcast a program which denied the Holocaust. In January 2006, there was no official recognition of international Holocaust Memorial Day in BiH. In May 2006, graffiti reading "Kill Jews" appeared on a wall in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza. Jewish leaders noted a tendency to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with anti-Semitism, as the general public and the media often failed to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

In January 2005, two anti-Semitic articles written by a local journalist were published in the Islamic extremist SAFF magazine and the tabloid magazine *Walter*. In addition to making general anti-Semitic statements (for example, denying the Holocaust), the articles accused the Jewish community and some of its individual members of corruption and conspiracy. One article included an altered photograph depicting the leader of the Jewish community wearing a yarmulke, a Hitler mustache, and an armband with Star of David insignia.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the country continued to meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern. In July 2005, more than 2,000 Catholics attended the consecration of the newly reconstructed church in the RS town of Doboje. In September 2005, the Catholic school center in Banja Luka reopened for the first time since the end of World War II.

In April 2006, the Government and the Holy See signed a basic agreement regulating the legal status of the Catholic Church in BiH. This agreement represented the culmination of six years of lobbying by church officials, who expressed satisfaction with its scope and provisions.

The Islamic community continued to reconstruct mosques throughout the RS, including the Osman Pasha Mosque in Trebinje and mosques in Konjevic Polje and Visegrad. During the last half of 2005, eighteen reconstructed mosques in the RS were reopened. The Islamic community estimates that it has reconstructed 130 mosques in the RS since the end of the war.

The leaders of BiH's four traditional religious communities participated in the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continued to operate despite occasional significant disagreements. Franciscan friar Ivo Markovic directed the "Pontanima" interfaith choir, which performed music from all four communities.

In July 2005, the leaders of the four traditional religious communities attended the ceremony marking the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. In November 2005, the leaders of the Serb Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities attended an interfaith conference in the United States during the commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton peace accords. Cardinal Vinko Puljic, the head of the Catholic Church in BiH, declined to attend on the grounds that the Dayton agreement had harmed the interests of the Bosnian Croat people, and that it would therefore be wrong for him to attend events related to the anniversary.

Beginning in September 2005, the Ministry of Education of Sarajevo Canton introduced an hour-long history lecture in the Jewish museum for all primary and secondary school students.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Until the nineteenth century, most of the country's residents identified themselves by religious affiliation. With the rise of Balkan nationalism in the nineteenth century, the country came to identify itself in ethnic as well as religious terms. This tendency increased during the communist era when the regime discouraged religious affiliation and targeted religious officials for harassment and persecution, including arrest and detention. Under the communists, most of the country's population identified themselves by ethnic group or simply as "Yugoslavs." Bosniaks were not considered an official ethnic group. Only with the adoption of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution could Muslims identify themselves as such in the census. Following the country's independence, there continued to be persons who declined to accept either ethnic or religious identification and considered themselves simply Bosnians.

Religious buildings, clerics, and individual believers in any area where they constituted a religious minority bore the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by other members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constituted the majority. Because they were powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings were favored targets. Most religious leaders severely criticized violence and nationalism against their own group but could be less vocal in condemning acts against members of other groups.

The 1992-1995 war was not a religious conflict. However, the association of ethnicity and religion is so close that the bitterness engendered by the war and the large-scale casualties it caused contributed to mutual suspicion and distrust among members of all three major religious groups.

Despite the constitutional and legal provisions for religious freedom, some discrimination against religious minorities occurred in virtually all parts of the country. Discrimination remained a serious problem in the RS, particularly in the eastern RS, and in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination against non-Muslims appeared also to have worsened in some Bosniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities resided. Some Muslim communities in areas where Wahhabis and other Islamic fundamentalist movements have gained adherents were deeply divided over how to worship, dress, and perform certain religious ceremonies, including funerals.

While Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital of the country, had preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city, complaints of discrimination remained during the period covered by this report. Some non-Muslims reported feeling isolated and marginalized in the nation's capital. In February 2006, Muslims in Sarajevo protested the publication of a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad in a number of European countries. Although the protests were generally peaceful, protestors burned a Croatian flag during one demonstration because the cartoon was published in Croatian newspapers. This action provoked criticism from Bosnian Croats. Protestors also burned Norwegian and Danish flags.

Numerous buildings belonging to the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communities were damaged or destroyed during the 1992-1995 war, usually in a deliberate attempt at ethnic intimidation. Despite the increase in issuance of building permits for reconstruction of religious buildings by Federation and RS authorities, the religious communities lacked funds to rebuild these facilities.

In the immediate postwar period, the major religious communities avoided reconstruction of the more symbolic religious facilities in the country, such as the Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, the Aladza mosque in Foca, and the monastery at Plehan near Derventa. The monastery at Plehan was partially reconstructed, and efforts were underway to rebuild the church in Plehan with financial support from the Bosnian Croat diaspora. Reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka had not begun by the end of this reporting period, but the Islamic community had the necessary permits and was collecting money to fund the construction.

Numerous incidents against religious targets in all three ethnic majority areas were reported throughout 2005 and the first half of 2006. All the major religious communities in the country reported an increase in the number of incidents during the period covered by this report.

There were a number of incidents directed at Bosniak Muslims during the period covered by this report. In June 2005, Muslim graves were desecrated near Prijedor in the RS. In July 2005, insulting graffiti were painted on the wall of the Zvornik mosque. In October 2005, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the mosque in Prijedor was vandalized on three separate occasions. In February 2006, the Islamic community building in Banja Luka was vandalized. Unknown persons wrote insulting or anti-Muslim graffiti on the walls of the Hadziosmanija mosque in Banja Luka in January 2005, on the house of an imam in Balinovac, near Mostar, in April 2005, and on the mosque in the RS town Zvornik in July. In December 2005, unknown persons vandalized Muslim gravestones in Banja Luka.

There were also incidents directed at Bosnian Croats and the Roman Catholic Church during the period covered by this report. In January 2006, unknown perpetrators placed a grenade launcher and a traffic sign on the bell tower of the Catholic church in Drvar, in the RS. In February 2006, the windows of the Church of Saint Mark in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilijas were broken by vandals. Two local men were subsequently arrested and the case was forwarded to the Sarajevo Canton prosecutor.

There were incidents directed against members of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox community during the period covered by this report. Serb Orthodox priests working in the Tuzla area reported that funeral services were disrupted by local residents shouting anti-Serb slogans on several different occasions. The church in Puracic near Lukavac was vandalized in January 2006.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. government supports the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The U.S. government also encourages leaders from all major religious communities to promote a multiethnic society that is conducive to religious freedom. The embassy publicly criticizes instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encourages political leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. Strong U.S. government support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic government is intended, over time, to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

When the local Seventh-day Adventist Church encountered difficulties in registering their religious community, the embassy intervened on their behalf with the responsible officials at the Ministry of Justice. The subsequent resolution of remaining problems with the Church's registration application allowed the Church to legally register and operate throughout the country.

The embassy has also continued to lobby strongly for the drafting and adoption of a State Law on Restitution, which would assist religious communities in obtaining return of their former property. The embassy supported a number of specific initiatives by religious communities to get back their properties, including the efforts of the Serb Orthodox Church to reclaim its former theology faculty building in downtown Sarajevo.

The ambassador frequently meets with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and a multiethnic society. Other embassy personnel regularly meet with representatives of all religious communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. The ambassador is a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversees the continued development of the memorial and cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica-area Muslim men and boys in Potocari.

The U.S. government funded the development of the countrywide human rights and democracy courses currently being taught in all Bosnian secondary schools. In 2005, this project was expanded and the course was being taught in madrassahs and at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences.

In addition, the embassy engages in an active outreach program with the religious communities at all levels, including hosting speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, and supporting a university affiliation program between the University of Sarajevo and the University of Arizona to create a department of comparative religious studies.

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