



## Hungary

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, friction between the Government and religious organizations over recent laws affecting the funding of church-run educational and social institutions continued during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government 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.

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. The remainder was divided among a number of other religious organizations, the largest of which was the Congregation of Faith, a broad range of other Christian groups, five Orthodox religious groups, seven Buddhist groups, and three Islamic communities.

Foreign representatives from a variety of religious groups and missionary organizations are active in the country.

Data protection regulations impeded the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys and other evidence 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 the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities of, and the benefits enjoyed by, religious communities; it also establishes the criteria for legal designation. To register, religious groups must submit a statement to a county court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. The court determines whether the new group complies with constitutional and legal requirements; if so, the court cannot reject the registration request. The requirements are easy to meet, and registration is essentially pro forma. 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. In 2006 eight new religious groups were registered, including Our Lady Love Church, Hungarian Chinese Christian Church, Holistic Church, Elisabeth Sisterhood, Hungarian Prophetic Church, Saint Camille Christian Church, Active Love Society, and Christian Community for Religious Renewal.

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 were negotiating 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 significantly altered.

In July 2006 governmental reorganization made the Department for Church Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for religious issues. The head of the department is a senior political counselor who reports directly to the Minister on religious issues.

Citizens are able to 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 2006 this supplementary funding amounted to \$66 million (HUF 12.2 billion). 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 nonrestituted religious property, and assistance to church personnel serving the smallest villages. In 2006 this amounted to nearly \$74.6 million (HUF 13.8 billion). The Government also provided financial support for church-run social services and schools at the same level as state-run institutions. In 2006 this form of support amounted to an estimated \$362 million (HUF 67 billion).

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.

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

State financial aid to various churches for educational and social services continued to be a source of contention in church-state relations. The 1997 Vatican Treaty and several other agreements obligate the Government to provide the same amount of per capita funding to church-run social institutions as it does to public institutions, such as schools and old-age homes. Under recent austerity measures, the Government significantly cut back public services, especially in education and health care. The four historical religious groups claimed they faced discriminatory per capita funding for the public service institutions they operate, particularly schools. They called on the Government to equalize funding. Religious groups also criticized the Government for a perceived unwillingness to negotiate or communicate about improving financial regulations. 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 Accord. The court had not ruled on the case by the end of the period covered by this report.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic and Reformed 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. The Government acknowledged the delays, attributing them to technical difficulties, but has indicated that the funding would be transferred in late 2007. Many church-run art collections were closed during the last 2 years due to the lack of state financial support.

The military chaplain service has permanent pastoral representation by the four historical religious groups. The Government also requires the military to provide pastoral care for members of other groups. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain service. The Roman Catholic Church and the Government were renegotiating 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 regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services in prisons.

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 Church) chose to use the new procedure; neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran Churches opted for the procedure. From 2006 until the end of the reporting period, 549 properties (worth up to \$49.1 million or HUF 8.8 billion) were restituted, and \$96 million (HUF 17 billion) was paid as compensation. The Protestant churches had 260 outstanding cases (\$25.2 million or HUF 4.5 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. They proposed setting up a joint commission including the Government and Jewish community representatives to discuss the matter.

In May 2006 the Data Protection Ombudsman published an open letter in which he expressed concern over the manner in which the Church of Scientology handles the data it records about its members, particularly the use of the so-called e-meter. The Ombudsman asserted that the Church was not sufficiently concrete in stating to what end the information is collected and that the waiver signed by members forfeits for all time their right to access information collected on them. The Ombudsman called upon the Church to fully conform to data protection laws. On June 23, 2006, a church spokesperson responded that the Ombudsman had overstepped his jurisdiction and interfered in the religious freedom of the Church. The Church also filed a lawsuit against the Ombudsman for refusing to release a copy of an official report by the National Bureau of Investigation on the use of the e-meter. On October 31, 2006, the Budapest Municipal Court refused to hear the case because it stated the case lacked legal basis. Upon closure of the Ombudsman's procedure, the report was released to the public on October 19, 2006.

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.

#### Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was reportedly on the rise in public discourse of political leaders and in the form of attacks on Jewish cemeteries.

The Jewish community stated that acts of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries increased during the reporting period. However, as in previous years, Jewish community leaders attributed most of the vandalism to youths and did not consider the incidents anti-Semitic, indicating that similar vandalism had occurred in Christian cemeteries as well.

Representatives of the Jewish community believed there was a rise in anti-Semitism towards the end of 2006. They expressed concern over anti-Semitism in some media outlets, in society, and in coded political speech. 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.

Incidents of anti-Semitism were also observed during the demonstrations of September and October 2006 in slogans and speeches made by extreme-right leaders. Some participants in the antigovernment protests displayed images linked to the World War II-era right wing Hungarian Arrow Cross party, and Nazi symbols and chants were seen and heard. Some demonstrators erected a "wall of shame," which displayed a list of names of those thought to be responsible for the government crisis. The list highlighted Jewish personalities. Some offenders threw objects in the direction of the Great Synagogue in Budapest.

Additionally, the Government expressed concern over the public display of the Arpad flag, whose history includes association with, or use by, the WWII-era fascist government. The opposition rejected the Government's claim, stating that

the Arpad flag, as it appears at right-wing rallies, is not a symbol of the WWII-era Arrow Cross party since it lacks the Arrow Cross symbol and that the original Arpad flag dates back hundreds of years. The Jewish community also expressed concern that the Hungarian Soccer Federation was not doing enough to curb anti-Semitic outbursts among the core fans of a few soccer clubs. The Jewish community indicated that during the reporting period these types of incidents were more limited than in previous years.

On June 28, 2007, demonstrators interrupted a Klubradio broadcast in Debrecen and attacked a Jewish staff writer for Nepszabadsag. At least one demonstrator hit the victim and shouted that he should "return to Israel." Several demonstrators shouted obscenities and waved the Arpad flag, which is often associated with the political far right. Reportedly, police on the site did not intervene.

In December 2006 vandals spray-painted a Jewish community building in the city of Pecs with swastikas and Nazi slogans.

Police closed investigation into a vandalism incident which occurred on November 6, 2006, at a Jewish synagogue in Vac because they could not identify any suspects. Unknown offenders painted black paint over the fence of the synagogue and sprayed anti-Semitic graffiti, swastikas, and other fascist symbols. They also vandalized a Jewish school, stealing a marble tablet presented to the school by the city to memorialize the Holocaust.

On July 28, 2006, two members of the Left-Wing Front-Communist Youth Alliance participating in an anti-Israel protest in Budapest carried Israeli flags defaced with swastikas.

In an interview on March 2, 2007, with the United Kingdom daily The Times, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany claimed that Fidesz chairman Viktor Orban was "benefiting from anti-Semitism in an attempt to derail the Government's modernization programs." Fidesz faction leader Tibor Navracsics vehemently rejected the Prime Minister's comments and challenged Gyurcsany to find one anti-Semitic member of Fidesz.

Just prior to the March 15, 2007 celebrations of the country's 1848 revolution, Peter Feldmajer, president of the Jewish federation Mazsihisz, urged members of the Jewish community to remain at home on March 15 for their safety. Other prominent Jewish leaders openly criticized Feldmajer's remarks, claiming that he had significantly overstated the danger.

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

The Government continued its strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by speaking out against the use of coded speech by right-wing extremists, and the Prime Minister publicly stated that citizens also bore responsibility for the Holocaust.

After holding a successful conference in December chaired by the Minister of Education and Culture, in March 2007 the country passed the chairmanship of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research to the Czech Republic.

On April 16, 2007, the President attended the annual Hungarian Holocaust Remembrance Day gathering at Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center. He stated that the Holocaust was an event which all Europeans must continuously remember, not just one day a year. The Prime Minister called on all members in Parliament to sign the "Declaration of Zero Tolerance" for racist and anti-Semitic remarks. The opposition also made an exception to its policy of walking out on the Prime Minister's remarks, out of respect for the occasion. All parliamentary parties signed the declaration, and it was submitted to the Parliamentary Library on May 8, 2007.

On April 15, 2007, government and opposition politicians jointly paid tribute to Hungarian victims of the Holocaust at commemorations held at various places in Budapest. The Prime Minister led a procession of thousands of persons in the March of the Living. The Speaker of Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court attended the event along with representatives of all parliamentary parties.

On January 18, 2007, the Speaker of Parliament, President of the Supreme Court, cabinet ministers, members of the opposition, and a number of other public figures attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto.

Parliament passed Act XLVII, which took effect on March 31, 2006, and was scheduled to expire on July 31, 2006, but was later extended until January 2007. The act reopened the window for compensation claims from those individuals whose immediate relatives were killed in the Holocaust or were sent to Soviet forced labor camps. 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 or pension worth up to \$2,162 (HUF 400,000) for each parent, sibling, or child who was killed. During this period more than 97,500 claims from 60 countries were submitted to the Central Judiciary Agency. By the end of the reporting period, 10,500 decisions were issued and \$9.2 million (HUF 1.7 billion) was

transferred to the eligible applicants.

During the period covered by this report, the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) continued to work directly with representatives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum regarding access to Holocaust-era archives. Under the direction of the PMO, a working group was convened with U.S. and Hungarian representatives in late November 2006. The working group met again in March 2007, and its work was ongoing.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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.

Reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property increased, as did burglaries involving places of worship. In 2006 the National Police reported 352 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, compared to 216 in 2005. There were also 35 reports of vandalism in churches. Most police and religious authorities considered these incidents to be acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

The weekly newspaper Magyar Demokrata continued to publish anti-Semitic articles, as did the more radical weekly Magyar Forum.

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.

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

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

The U.S. Government also discussed religious freedom with Members of Parliament, leaders of religious groups, and representatives of local and international NGOs that address issues of religious freedom. Embassy officers tracked closely the dispute over parochial school funding and the possible effect on clergy that proposed lustration legislation could have.

The Embassy continued to urge the Government to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech. In addition, in April 2007 the Embassy facilitated a visit by the Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, who delivered remarks at the March of the Living, met with the government leaders, and conducted a survey of a cemetery for possible restoration. The Embassy also assisted with a visit by another commission member, who delivered remarks at a Jewish cemetery dedication in Gyongyos on May 31, 2007.

The Embassy facilitated the transfer of Holocaust-era records to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum 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, the Hungarian Jewish Public Foundation, other local and international Jewish organizations, Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the PMO on restitution issues and to promote fair compensation.

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