

MOLDOVA 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects the right of individuals to practice their religion and states religious groups are autonomous and independent from the state. The law, however, recognizes the “exceptional importance” of Orthodox Christianity. Minority religious groups and others reported the government continued to provide preferential treatment to the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC) and that the MOC exerted strong influence over government policies and electoral politics. Several legal cases involving minority religions continued to be unresolved. The case of two leaders of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church) who were released from house arrest in 2016 was pending. Minority religious groups continued to state that local public administrations in rural areas commonly discriminated against them. Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to report poor police response to acts against them. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Baptists reported continuing difficulty in obtaining buildings in which to worship despite court orders. In September the Supreme Court of Justice ruled in favor of the Jewish community by dismissing a claim lodged by the Agency of Public Property and upholding the Court of Appeals decision. The Court of Appeals decision rejected the Agency of Public Property’s claim on the Rabbi Tzirilson Synagogue and Magen David Yeshiva ruins, both purchased by the Jewish community in 2010. Following parliament’s 2016 endorsement of the Elie Wiesel Commission’s *Report on the Holocaust*, the government approved a 2017-19 action plan that included a commitment to establish a National Holocaust Museum; special sessions of parliament and government to commemorate Holocaust victims; and developing content on the Holocaust for history textbooks. A new law, which allows individuals, but not companies or other legal entities, to redirect 2 percent of their income tax to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or religious organizations, came into force in January.

In the separatist Transnistria region, NGOs continued to report that the de facto authorities discriminated against, restricted the activities of, and monitored activities of minority religious groups. The de facto authorities barred Jehovah’s Witnesses from displaying religious literature, and the Muslim community said it continued to refrain from overt religious activities because of past intimidation by the de facto authorities. Three Jehovah’s Witnesses’ complaints of discriminatory acts in Tiraspol to the UN Human Rights Committee against the country of Moldova and the Russian Federation remained pending at year’s end.

On March 22, three Jehovah's Witnesses reported a verbal attack by an Orthodox priest. The Islamic League, which encompasses a majority of the Muslim community in the country as the only registered Muslim umbrella organization, reported an incident in November in which a Chisinau school teacher humiliated a Muslim student in front of his classmates, saying, "You are those who kill" and "Islam itself kills." The Jewish community reported two acts of vandalism during the year, a decrease from the previous year. On August 24, a monument to the victims of the Holocaust was damaged the night before its opening ceremony. In April unknown vandals set fire to plants and stray animals, causing damage to a cemetery in Chisinau.

The Ambassador regularly engaged the government on the case of the Rabbi Tsrilson Synagogue and Magen David Yeshiva. The embassy sponsored several events that focused on religious freedom and tolerance, such as a photographic exhibit at parliament from the U.S. Holocaust Museum, and presentation of a book entitled "The Kishinev Ghetto in 1941-1942: A Documentary History of the Holocaust in Romania's Contested Borderlands" together with the Ministry of Culture. The Ambassador and embassy officials called for enhancing interfaith tolerance and dialogue. U.S. embassy officials discussed respect for the rights of religious minorities and combating religious intolerance with representatives of religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 3.47 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the 2014 census, the predominant religion is Orthodox Christianity, with 90 percent of the population belonging to one of two Orthodox Christian groups. Of Orthodox adherents, approximately 90 percent belong to the MOC, which is subordinate to the Russian Orthodox Church, and the remaining 10 percent belong to the Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC), which falls under the Romanian Orthodox Church. Nearly 7 percent of the population did not identify a religious affiliation. The largest non-Orthodox religious groups, accounting for 15,000 to 30,000 adherents each, are Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical Christians, Roman Catholics, evangelical Lutherans, Muslims, Jews, and atheists.

Smaller religious groups include Bahais, Molokans, Messianic Jews, Presbyterians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Evangelical Christian

Church, Unification Church), other Christians, Falun Gong, and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

In the separatist Transnistria region, an estimated 80 percent of the population belongs to the MOC. Other religious groups in the region include Catholics, followers of Old Rite Orthodoxy, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and charismatic Christians, Jews, Lutherans, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution stipulates equal treatment for all citizens regardless of religion and guarantees freedom of conscience, manifested in “a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect,” and of religious worship. It states religious groups may organize and operate according to their own statutes, independent from the state. The constitution prohibits all actions instigating religious hatred and “any manifestation of discord” between religious groups. The constitution stipulates the state shall support religious worship, including facilitating religious assistance in the army, hospitals, penitentiaries, nursing homes, and orphanages.

The law states every person has the right to belong or not belong to a religion, to have or not have individual beliefs, to change religion or beliefs, and to practice religion or beliefs independently or as a group, in public or in private, through teaching, religious practices, or rituals. According to the law, religious freedom may be restricted only if necessary to ensure public order and security, to protect public health and morality, or to protect a person's rights and freedoms. The law also prohibits discrimination based on religious affiliation.

The law stipulates that the state recognize the “exceptional importance and fundamental role” of Orthodox Christianity, particularly that of the MOC, in the life, history, and culture of the country.

The law allows religious groups to establish associations and foundations. It permits local religious groups to change their denominational affiliation or dissolve themselves. The law exempts registered religious groups from paying real estate and land taxes.

In January a law came into force that allows individuals, but not companies or other legal entities, to redirect 2 percent of their income tax to NGOs or religious

organizations. Religious groups wanting to benefit from the new provisions must register with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and use the amounts received only for social, moral, cultural, and/or charitable activities. The law exempts religious organizations from registration fees and from paying tax on the income received as donations under the 2 percent law.

The law provides for a registration process in which a religious group must present to the MOJ a declaration including its exact name, fundamental principles of belief, organizational structure, and scope of activities, financing sources, and rights and obligations of membership. The law also requires a group to show it has at least 100 founding members. A religious group must present proof of having access to premises where it can conduct its religious activities, but the law does not specify that the group must own this property. The MOJ is required by law to register a religious group within 30 days if the registration request is made according to law. The applicant may request this term to be extended if the government determines the documentation submitted is insufficient. At the request of the MOJ, a court may suspend the registered status of a religious group if it “carries out activities that harm the constitution or laws,” or “affects state security, public order, [or] the life and security of the people.” The law also provides for suspension or revocation of a religious group’s registration in case of violation of international agreements or for political activity.

The law does not require registration, but only registered religious groups possess status as legal entities allowing them to build churches, own land in cemeteries or other property, publish or import religious literature, open bank accounts, or employ staff. Registration also exempts them from land taxes and property taxes. Individual churches or branches of registered religious groups are not required to register with the MOJ as long as they do not carry out legal transactions and do not receive donations as local legal entities. The parent organization must exercise authority in those areas for unregistered local branches.

The law allows all religious groups to hold services at state facilities, including prisons, orphanages, hospitals, schools, and military and police institutions, at the request of individuals in such institutions, provided they obtain the approval of the institution’s administration.

Through an agreement with the MOJ, MOC chaplains have free access to detention facilities for religious assistance without prior approval of the prison administration. In addition, the MOC has a separate agreement with the Ministry of Defense, which allows MOC priests to preach to army units, bless military

personnel prior to their deployment in peacekeeping missions, and distribute religious literature to libraries within the army.

The law bans religious entities from engaging in political activity and prohibits “abusive proselytism,” defined as the action of changing religious beliefs through coercion.

Although the law provides for restitution of property confiscated during the successive fascist and Soviet regimes to politically repressed or exiled persons, the provision does not apply to property confiscated from religious groups. Under previous agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the MOC, the government transferred control of most confiscated churches and monasteries to the MOC. Property disputes between the MOC and BOC churches have not been resolved. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the remaining churches and monasteries not under the control of the MOC. Local authorities working through the Ministry of Culture may arrange with local parishes to return or lease those churches or monasteries to religious groups. Property restitution continued to be a problem for the Jewish community, and there is no law to address it.

The constitution provides for freedom of religious education and stipulates the state educational system “shall be of a lay nature.” According to the law, religion classes in state educational institutions are optional. Students submit a written request to the school’s administration to enroll in a religion class. Religion classes are offered in grades one through nine. No alternative classes are offered for those who choose not to enroll in religion classes. The religion curriculum offers two types of courses: one for Orthodox denominations and Roman Catholics, and the second for evangelical Christians and Seventh-day Adventists. The religious curriculum for Orthodox and Catholic groups derives from instructional manuals developed by the Ministry of Education with input from the MOC and includes teaching guidelines developed with the support of the BOC. Teachers and Orthodox priests teach these optional courses, which focus on Orthodox Christianity. Teachers and representatives of the Evangelical Christian Church teach the second course, which is based on translated religious manuals and literature from Romania, the United States, and Germany. Both courses teach religious doctrine as well as moral and spiritual values.

The law mandates immunization of all children before they may enroll in kindergarten. It does not provide an exception for religious reasons.

The Anti-Discrimination Council, established by law, is an independent institution charged with reviewing complaints of discrimination, including discrimination of a religious character or based on religious affiliation. Parliament chooses members through a competitive process, appointing them to five-year terms. The council does not have sanctioning powers; however, it can determine if an act of discrimination took place, offer advice on how to remedy the situation, and send requests to prosecutors to initiate criminal proceedings. It can also suggest pertinent legislative amendments or participate in working groups authoring legislative initiatives.

According to the law, citizens ages 18 to 27 have the right to choose civilian over military service if the latter runs counter to their religious beliefs. The standard duration of both alternative civilian and military service is 12 months; university graduates may choose six months of civilian service or three months of military training. Those who choose civilian service may complete it at public institutions or enterprises specializing in such areas as social assistance, health care, industrial engineering, urban planning, roads and road construction, environmental protection, agriculture or agricultural processing, town management, and fire rescue. There are no blanket exemptions for religious groups from the civilian service alternative, but higher-ranking clergy, monks, and theology students are exempted from alternative service. Refusal to enroll in civilian service is punishable by a fine up to 32,000 lei (\$1,900) or between 100 and 150 hours of community service.

The law defines as “extremist” and makes illegal any document or information justifying war crimes or the complete or partial annihilation of a religious or other kind of societal group as well as any document calling for or supporting activities in pursuit of those goals.

Foreign missionaries may submit work contracts or volunteer agreements to apply for a temporary residency permit and may reside and work in a paid status or as unpaid volunteers. Only missionaries working with registered religious groups may apply for temporary residency permits. Foreign religious workers with these permits must register with the National Agency for the Occupation of the Workforce, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum, and the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications. They must present documents confirming the official status of the registered religious group for which they will work, papers confirming their temporary residence, and proof of valid local health insurance. Other foreign missionaries belonging to registered religious groups may remain for 90 days on a tourist visa.

In separatist Transnistria, Transnistrian “law” affirms the special role of the Orthodox Church in the region’s culture and spirituality. The de facto law “recognizes respect” for Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religious groups historically present in the region. All religious groups, whether registered or not, officially have freedom to worship, but the law permits restrictions on the right to freedom of conscience and religion “if necessary to protect the constitutional order, morality, health, citizens’ rights and interests, or state defense and security.” Foreign citizens also have the freedom to worship. The prosecutor’s office oversees implementation of the law on religious freedom.

In March amendments to the Transnistrian “law” on religion entered into effect, prohibiting proselytizing in persons’ homes and limiting distribution of religious literature to houses of worship and special premises designated by the “authorities.”

The same “law,” passed in 2009, requires the reregistration of religious groups to operate legally in the region. The region’s self-declared “Ministry of Justice” registers religious groups and monitors their adherence to the goals and activities set forth in their statutes. Registration provides a number of advantages to religious groups, including the ability to own and build places of worship, open religious schools, and publish literature.

To register, a local religious group must present proof of activity in the region for at least 10 years; a list comprising at least 10 members ages 18 years or older with permanent residence in one of the seven administrative-territorial units in the region and Transnistrian “citizenship”; a list of founders and governing members and their personal details; the group’s charter, statutes, and minutes of its constituent assembly; basic religious doctrine; contact details of its governing body; and a receipt indicating payment of the registration fee. Local religious groups may also register as part of a centralized religious organization, which must consist of at least three local religious groups that have previously registered separately as legal entities. In that case, their application must additionally include a copy of the registration papers of the centralized organizations. The central religious organizations must inform the registration authority on a yearly basis about intentions to extend their activities.

The de facto authorities must decide to register a religious group within 30 days of the application. If they decide to conduct a religious assessment, which is a law enforcement investigation of the group’s background and activities, registration

may be postponed for up to six months or denied if the investigating authorities determine the group poses a threat to the security or morality of the region, or if foreign religious groups are involved in its activities.

Foreign religious groups may not register or undertake religious activities. Foreigners may only worship individually; they may not be founders or members of religious groups.

Religious groups disband on their own decision or upon a “court’s” decision. The “prosecutor’s office” or the region’s de facto executive, city, or district authorities can request the courts to disband or suspend a religious group on multiple grounds, including disturbing public order or violating public security; conducting extremist activities; coercing persons into breaking up their families; infringing on citizens’ identity, rights, and freedoms; violating citizens’ morality and well-being, including the use of psychotropic substances, drugs, hypnosis, or perverse activities during religious activities; encouraging suicide or the refusal of medical treatment for religious reasons; obstructing compulsory education; using coercion for alienation of property to the benefit of the religious community; and encouraging refusal to fulfil civic duties.

The “law” allows the use of private homes and apartments to hold religious services. It does not, however, allow religious groups to use homes and apartments as their officially registered addresses. The “law” also allows such groups to hold religious services and rituals in public places such as hospitals, clinics, orphanages, geriatric homes, and prisons.

The authorities screen and may ban the import and export of religious printed materials, audio and video recordings, and other religious items.

According to the “law,” citizens have the right to choose alternative civilian service over military service if the latter contradicts an individual’s religion and beliefs. Alternative civilian service may be performed only at organizations under the Transnistrian authority or “other military forces,” and at institutions subordinate to the “executive bodies of the state or local administration.”

The de facto authorities do not allow religious groups to participate in elections or other political party activities or to support NGOs involved in elections.

Moldova is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Summary paragraph: Religious minorities reported various difficulties such as lack of tolerance, verbal abuse, and discrimination when renting or purchasing property or building houses of worship. They stated that in general the central authorities were more supportive but they often encountered opposition from local authorities. In a July 3 meeting with 100 MOC priests to discuss the impact of religion on society, President Igor Dodon said, “Orthodoxy is the force uniting the majority of ethnic minorities. Consolidation of Moldovan society is only possible through a moral-spiritual foundation like the Christian Orthodox faith.” In September the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Jewish community by dismissing the claim lodged by the Agency of Public Property and upholding the Court of Appeals decision that rejected the Agency of Public Property’s claim on the Rabbi Tsirilson Synagogue and Magen David Yeshiva ruins, both purchased by the Jewish community in 2010.

The Unification Church reported no developments in the case of their two leaders’ arrest in 2015 and later release on judicial control on human trafficking charges, which remained pending at year’s end. Authorities had arrested Mihai Calestru and Oleg Savencov on human trafficking charges, saying they had recruited, transported, and harbored persons for labor exploitation. They also charged that the Church was founded as an organized criminal group. While under judicial control, the church leaders had no restrictions on worship or practice, and they moved freely throughout the country.

The MOJ registered 38 religious entities during the year, consisting of religious groups as component parts of existing religious denominations, including the Baptist Church, Old Rite Church, MOC, BOC, Evangelical Church, Seventh-day Adventists, and Union of Pentecostal Churches. It did not reject any registration applications.

During the year, 46 religious groups received 1.65 million lei (\$96,800) from redirected income tax.

The Falun Gong associations’ two complaints to the European Court of Human Rights filed in 2015, after they exhausted all national court proceedings facing charges of violating the law on extremist activity by the Falun symbol incorporating five swastikas based on Buddhist and Chinese tradition, were pending at year’s end. They also had a pending case in the courts on the liquidation of the organization.

Jehovah's Witnesses leaders reported opposition from local authorities in acquiring properties for building houses of worship. Most of their requests were slowed by refusal of local authorities to issue permits, urban building certificates, or authorizations for construction; long court proceedings; and residents protesting their presence. Police failed to prosecute individuals who threatened or verbally abused members of Jehovah's Witnesses in rural localities, such as the failure to prosecute a priest who verbally threatened three Jehovah's Witnesses with physical violence in Vulpesti.

In September the Ciorescu Village Council banned religious preaching and distribution of religious literature in the territory of Ciorescu, calling it "propaganda." Following this decision, police charged two Jehovah's Witnesses representatives with distributing religious literature in the territory on December 15. The police officer testified he was forced to fine them, according to Jehovah's Witnesses representatives; the Jehovah's Witnesses then filed a complaint with the court.

In March the Union of Pentecostal Churches filed a complaint with the court against the MOJ, Falesti local administration, and the court bailiff requesting compensation for nonmaterial losses suffered, due to the failure to reasonably enforce a 2010 court ruling. In 2010, after five years of litigation with the local administration in the city of Falesti, the Supreme Court issued a final ruling ordering the local mayor to change the designation of the building from a private home to a church. Local administration officials, however, refused to follow the court ruling. The case was pending at year's end.

In September, after three years of dispute, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Jewish community by dismissing the claim lodged by the Agency of Public Property and upholding the Court of Appeals decision that rejected the Agency of Public Property's claim on a synagogue and yeshiva. In 2010 the Jewish community had purchased the Rabbi Tsirilson Synagogue and Magen David Yeshiva ruins, later claimed by the Agency of Public Property.

Through an earlier agreement with the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family, the MOC continued to develop a network of social assistance, including opening day care centers and temporary shelters within churches and monasteries.

The authorities continued to grant greater freedom to the MOC, compared to other religious groups, to import religious materials and privileges pertaining to the

restitution of church property. In addition, the government also continued to grant privileges, such as invitations to officiate at state-sponsored events, national holidays, and blessing ceremonies at schools, to MOC clergy it did not grant to other religious groups.

In August an online petition by a civic group requested the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research to ban blessing services during an opening ceremony of the school year. The ministry declined to intervene, stating it was in the local authorities' power to decide on the issue. The MOC decided blessing services during school opening ceremonies should be no longer than five minutes.

On July 3, President Igor Dodon met with 100 MOC priests to discuss the impact of religion on society, making a donation of 8,000 books to be used for studying Orthodox Christianity in schools. A press release quoted President Dodon as stating, "Orthodoxy is the force uniting the majority of ethnic minorities. The Christian Orthodox faith is the only moral-spiritual basis able to strengthen Moldovan society."

The Seventh-day Adventists Reform Movement continued to report problems enrolling children in preschools as a result of their refusal to have children immunized. In response to an appeal sent to the Ministry of Health in September, the minister of education stated the refusal of mandatory immunization of children for religious reasons should not be an impediment to their enrollment in schools. According to the Ministry of Education, a health certificate should be sufficient to allow enrollment. A working group created in 2016 by the ministry tasked with ensuring access to educational facilities to children whose parents refused them immunization for religious or philosophical reasons continued to meet during the year but made no recommendations.

Representatives of the Union of Pentecostal Churches continued to report problems with the customs office, including its raising artificial barriers, as well as imperfect legislation, restricting imports of humanitarian assistance.

Minority religious groups, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims, reported local authorities were often reluctant to allocate land for the construction of houses of worship. Jehovah's Witnesses stated local mayors or councilors were pressured by Orthodox priests to discriminate against Jehovah's Witnesses, and local public officials and priests serving as local councilors refused to execute court orders allowing use of facilities by Jehovah's Witnesses for worship.

On June 7, an appeals court overturned a 2016 lower court decision in a permit case for a building owned by Jehovah's Witnesses. The lower court ruled in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses, allowing for construction to go forward. The appeals court referred the case back to the lower court on the grounds that the lower court had not conducted proper due diligence to verify the validity of the building permit. The case was pending at year's end. Jehovah's Witnesses reported the case began in 2016 when the mayor and local councilors in Olanesti refused to grant a zoning change that would allow the community to use its completed Kingdom Hall, for which they said they had completed all bureaucratic formalities and provided all necessary documentation.

NGOs and advocacy groups noted the government had no laws or mechanisms in place to address Holocaust-era claims of communal property restitution and reported the government had made no progress on resolution of these claims, including for foreign citizens.

The Jewish Community of Moldova continued to report state authorities failed to respond to anti-Semitic acts, including vandalism and hate speech. Community leaders continued to state police were reluctant to take action or allowed the perpetrators to escape prosecution.

In May the government approved an action plan for 2017-19 on the implementation of parliament's 2016 endorsement of the Elie Wiesel Commission's *Report on the Holocaust*. The action plan provides for a number of specific actions, including a commitment to establish a National Holocaust Museum in Chisinau; special one-hour sessions of the parliament and government to commemorate Holocaust victims on January 27, including a nationwide moment of silence; developing an optional curriculum for high schools and a general schools course: *The Holocaust: History and Lessons*; developing content on the Holocaust for history textbooks; and organizing guided tours to Holocaust memorial sites. The Jewish community reported limited government progress in fulfilling this plan.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Human rights experts, including representatives from Promo-Lex, continued to report minority religious groups in Transnistria not favored by the Russian Orthodox Church, including Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, and Pentecostals, were treated unequally as compared to the more "traditional"

religious groups. Minority religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, continued to refrain from requesting registration or from engaging in any other activities due to the history of local authorities refusing to register these groups and preventing them from displaying or distributing religious literature. The Muslim community reported the Transnistria de facto authorities suggested it join the Russian Muslim community and stay away from the Moldovan Muslim community. According to minority religious groups, local security forces continued monitoring their activities.

Jehovah's Witnesses said Transnistrian de facto authorities continued to refuse to reregister two local Jehovah's Witnesses groups. The UN Human Rights Committee sent a complaint made by the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tiraspol against Moldova to the Moldovan authorities for comments. In 2016 three Jehovah's Witnesses in Tiraspol filed complaints against Moldova (which had sovereignty, but not control, over Transnistria) and the Russian Federation to the UN Human Rights Committee for refusing to reregister the religious group.

The Muslim community continued to run a cultural and an educational center in Transnistria but again did not attempt to register as a religious community. The Muslim community continued to state it avoided undertaking any overt religious activity because of previous attempts by the region's authorities to intimidate it.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Jehovah's Witnesses reported five incidents of societal abuse, consisting mainly of verbal intimidation, and actions impeding religious activities. For instance, on March 22, Jehovah's Witnesses reported Ciugureanu Viorel, an Orthodox priest, prevented three Jehovah's Witnesses from exercising their religious rights in Vulpesti village and verbally threatened to assault them. The victims filed a complaint with police, who found the priest's actions did not break any law; police did, however, verbally warn the priest not to interfere with the religious rights of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the future.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to state that in a number of villages, local Orthodox priests instigated hatred and obstructed efforts by the Jehovah's Witnesses to either build new houses of worship or change the designation of premises they purchased.

According to the Islamic League, societal attitudes toward Muslims continued to improve, compared with previous years, but local media continued to exhibit a critical attitude and bias against Islam, portraying it in a negative light in news

articles and broadcasts. The Islamic League also said media outlets described crimes as “terrorist attacks” when a Muslim was involved, while news involving a non-Muslim was reported as a “crime” or “armed attack.” Following one such report, Muslim women were mocked in the streets and called “terrorists.”

The Islamic League reported Muslims faced discrimination in renting properties for housing.

The Islamic League reported a case of public humiliation of a pupil by a Chisinau schoolteacher that occurred in November. The teacher publicly humiliated the pupil in front of his schoolmates because he was a Muslim, saying, “You are those who kill” and “Islam itself kills.” At the parents’ request, the teacher apologized and promised this would never happen again.

Leaders of the Jewish community reported two acts of vandalism, a decrease from the previous year. On August 24, the monument to Holocaust victims in Orhei was damaged the night before the opening ceremony. Leaders submitted a complaint to local police, who arrested suspects. An investigation of the incident continued as of year’s end. In April vandals set fire to plants and stray animals in the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau, causing damage to some headstones. A complaint was submitted to police, but the case remained unresolved at year’s end. Anti-Semitic discourse and attitudes were present in recurrent comments and news items in some media outlets. A writers’ association reportedly nominated Paul Goma, a Romanian author accused of writing anti-Semitic texts, for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In Chisinau in September the ‘NEVER AGAIN’ Association, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Jewish Community of Moldova, and Oral History Institute in Chisinau organized a series of lectures and discussions framed around the recent publication of *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* by a Princeton University historian. The events featured discussion regarding relations between Christians and their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust and after the war. Prior to the discussion on September 13, Theatre Spalatorie performed Nicoletta Esinencu’s *Clear History*, which deals with the Holocaust in Bessarabia.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador regularly encouraged the prime minister to resolve the case of the Rabbi Tsirilson Synagogue and Magen David Yeshiva. Embassy officials organized events promoting religious tolerance together with the government. In a

March event held at parliament, the Ambassador delivered remarks at the opening of an exhibit displaying photographs on loan from the Kedem Jewish Center and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Ambassador noted that the country had made significant progress in honoring the memory of those who perished at the hands of the Nazis and was taking steps to teach the young generations about these tragic events. The embassy, together with the Ministry of Culture, organized a book presentation on “The Kishinev Ghetto in 1941-1942” by a museum official, hosted by parliament on February 9. The official also traveled to Transnistria to present his book.

Embassy officials met with leaders and representatives of the MOC, BOC, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslim groups, Baptist Church, and Pentecostal Church to discuss religious freedom, societal attitudes, and government actions or inaction with regard to religious groups. Embassy representatives also continued to meet regularly with leaders of the Jewish community to discuss respect for their rights and the challenges faced by the community.

On June 19, the embassy hosted an iftar with leaders and representatives of the Muslim community. Speaking at the event, the Ambassador noted tolerance of minority religious groups and interfaith dialogue in the country had improved in recent years, adding that only a tolerant society where human rights are respected, including religious freedoms, could be truly democratic and prosperous.