

SLOVAK REPUBLIC 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and affiliation and states the country is not bound to any particular faith. Registration requirements for religious groups include the need to present a petition with signatures of at least 50,000 adherents, which members of some religious groups considered discriminatory. Some groups registered as civic associations in order to function. Government officials and members of parliament (MPs) from both the government coalition and opposition parties continued to make anti-Muslim statements, and several political parties amplified anti-Muslim messages in their campaigns for the February parliamentary election. Authorities continued to criminally prosecute some members of the People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) for defaming minority religious beliefs and Holocaust denial. In October, a court sentenced the party's chairman to four-and-a-half years in prison after convicting him of an act of anti-Semitism. In January, the annual state subsidy to government-recognized religious communities increased by approximately 10 percent.

In January, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia reported what it called an Islamophobic attack against a Muslim student on a public bus in Bratislava, reportedly triggered by the student's use of an Islamic greeting in a telephone conversation. The Muslim community continued to report anti-Muslim hate speech on social media, which it attributed mostly to inflammatory public statements by politicians portraying Muslim refugees as an existential threat to the country's society. According to a survey by a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), more than 70 percent of citizens would find it unacceptable if a Muslim from Saudi Arabia moved into their neighborhood. Organizations that media described as far right continued to publish material, organize gatherings, commemorate the World War II (WWII)-era, Nazi-allied Slovak State, and praise its leaders. A survey by a local think tank found that 51 percent of citizens tended to believe in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Unregistered religious groups said the public tended to distrust them because of their lack of official government recognition.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officers raised with government officials, including the Minister of Culture and MPs, the treatment of religious minorities and the difficulties those groups faced regarding registration, as well as measures to counter what religious groups and others described as widespread anti-Semitism

and anti-Muslim sentiment. The Ambassador and other embassy officers also repeatedly raised public awareness of the importance of religious freedom, using private and public events to highlight the need for tolerance. The Ambassador organized an interfaith discussion with representatives of the country's registered and unregistered churches and religious communities, as well as the government, to discuss religious freedom, tolerance, interfaith relations, and the impact of COVID-19 on religious practice and services. A senior embassy official visited a desecrated Jewish cemetery, condemning vandalism and all forms of hatred and intolerance. Embassy officials met regularly with registered and unregistered religious organizations and NGOs to raise the issue of hate speech and to highlight the role of churches and religious groups in countering extremism and promoting tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.4 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the most recent census in 2011, Roman Catholics constitute 62 percent of the population, members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession 5.9 percent, and Greek Catholics 3.8 percent; 13.4 percent did not state a religious affiliation. There are smaller numbers of members of the Reformed Christian Church, other Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Orthodox Church, Jews, Baha'is, and Muslims. In the 2011 census, approximately 1,200 persons self-identified as Muslim, while representatives of the Muslim community estimate their number at 5,000. According to the census, there are approximately 2,000 Jews. According to the World Jewish Congress, there are approximately 2,600 Jewish residents.

Greek Catholics are generally ethnic Slovaks and Ruthenians, although some Ruthenians belong to the Orthodox Church. Most Orthodox Christians live in the eastern part of the country. Members of the Reformed Christian Church live primarily in the south, near the border with Hungary, where many ethnic Hungarians live. Other religious groups tend to be spread evenly throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and affiliation, as well as the right to change religious faith or to refrain from religious affiliation. It

prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. The constitution states the country is not bound to any particular faith, and religious groups shall manage their affairs independently from the state, including in providing religious education and establishing clerical institutions. The constitution guarantees the right to practice one's faith privately or publicly, either alone or in association with others. It states the exercise of religious rights may be restricted only by measures "necessary in a democratic society for the protection of public order, health, and morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

The law prohibits establishing, supporting, and promoting groups dedicated to the suppression of fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as "demonstrating sympathy" with such groups, which courts have interpreted to include Nazis and neo-Nazis. Violators are subject to up to five years' imprisonment.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Culture's Department of Church Affairs in order to employ spiritual leaders to perform officially recognized functions. Clergy from unregistered religious groups do not have the right to minister to their members in prisons or government hospitals. Civil functions such as weddings officiated by clergy from registered groups are recognized by the state, while those presided over by clergy from unregistered groups are not, and couples must undergo an additional civil ceremony. Unregistered groups may apply to provide spiritual guidance to their adherents in prisons, but they have no legal recourse if their requests are denied. Unregistered groups may conduct religious services, which the government recognizes as private, rather than religious, activities. Unregistered groups lack legal status and may not establish religious schools or receive government funding.

According to the law, organizations seeking registration as religious groups must have a minimum of 50,000 adherents. The 50,000 persons must be adult citizens or permanent residents and must submit to the Ministry of Culture an "honest declaration" attesting to their membership, knowledge of the articles of faith and basic tenets of the religion, personal identity numbers and home addresses of all members, and support for the group's registration. All groups registered before these requirements came into effect in 2017 remained registered without having to meet the 50,000-adherent requirement; no new religious groups have attained recognition under the revised requirements. According to the law, only groups that register using the title "church" in their official name may call themselves a church, but there is no other legal distinction between registered "churches" and other registered religious groups.

The 18 registered religious groups are: the Apostolic Church, Baha'i Community, The Brotherhood Unity of Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Brotherhood Church, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Evangelical Methodist Church, Greek Catholic Church, Christian Congregations (Krestanske zbory), Jehovah's Witnesses, New Apostolic Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church, and Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities. Registered groups receive annual state subsidies. All but the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Greek Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, and Roman Catholic Church have fewer than 50,000 members, but they registered before this requirement came into effect.

The Department of Church Affairs oversees relations between religious groups and the state and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. The ministry may not legally intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups or direct their activities.

In January, a legislative amendment took effect, increasing the total state subsidy to registered churches and religious communities and basing the funding for each group on the number of adherents reported in the most recent census, rather than the number of clergy. Under the new law, religious groups have more leeway to determine the use of the government subsidies, since these are no longer predominantly earmarked towards covering clergy salaries, and future payments will be adjusted for inflation.

A group lacking the 50,000 adult adherents required to obtain status as an official religious group may register as a civic association, which provides the legal status necessary to carry out activities such as maintaining a bank account, entering into a contract, or acquiring or renting property. In doing so, however, the group may not identify itself officially as a religious group, since the law governing registration of civic associations specifically excludes religious groups from obtaining this status. To register as a civic association, three citizens are required to provide their names and addresses and the name, goals, organizational structure, executive bodies, and budgetary rules of the group.

A concordat with the Holy See provides the legal framework for relations among the government, the Roman Catholic Church in the country, and the Holy See. Two corollaries cover the operation of Catholic religious schools, the teaching of Catholic religious education as a subject in public schools, and the service of

Catholic priests as military chaplains. A single agreement between the government and 11 of the 17 other registered religious groups provides similar status to those groups. These 11 religious groups may also provide military chaplains. The unanimous approval of all existing parties to the agreement is required for other religious groups to obtain similar benefits.

The law does not allow burial earlier than 48 hours following death.

All public elementary school students must take a religion or ethics class, depending on personal or parental preferences. Schools have some leeway in drafting their own curricula for religion classes, but these must be consistent with the Ministry of Education's National Educational Program. Representatives of registered religious communities are involved in the preparation of the National Education Program. Although most school religion classes teach Roman Catholicism, if there is a sufficient number of students, parents may ask a school to open a separate class focusing on the teachings of one of the other registered religious groups. All schools offer ethics courses as an alternative to religion classes. Alternatively, parents may request that teachings of different faiths be included in the curriculum of the Catholic religion classes. There are no clear requirements as to content when teaching about other faiths in the Catholic classes. Private and religious schools define their own content for religion courses, and may teach only their own religion, but are required to offer ethics courses as an alternative. In both public and private schools, religion class curricula do not mention unregistered groups or some of the smaller registered groups, and unregistered groups may not teach their faiths at schools. Teachers normally teach about the tenets of their own faith, although they may teach about other faiths as well. The Roman Catholic Church appoints teachers of Catholic classes. Depending on the registered religious group and the school, other religious groups may appoint the teachers of their classes. The government pays the salaries of religion teachers in public schools.

The law criminalizes issuance, possession, and dissemination of materials defending, supporting, or instigating hatred, violence, or unlawful discrimination against a group of persons on the basis of their religion. Such activity is punishable by up to eight years' imprisonment.

The law requires public broadcasters to allocate program time for registered religious groups but not for unregistered groups.

The law prohibits the defamation of a person's or group's belief, treating a violation as a criminal offense punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

The law prohibits Holocaust denial, including questioning, endorsing, or excusing the Holocaust. Violators face sentences of up to three years in prison. The law also prohibits denial of crimes committed by the Nazi-allied, WWII-era fascist and post-war communist regimes.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The Ministry of Culture again did not reconsider its 2007 rejection of the registration application of the Grace Christian Fellowship, despite Supreme Court rulings in 2009 and 2012 ordering it to do so. In the past, the ministry said it based its rejection on an opinion by a religious affairs expert that the group promoted hatred toward other religious groups.

Representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities reported that authorities were generally willing to make exceptions on grounds of religious belief and allow burials to take place within 24 hours, rather than requiring community members wait the legally mandated 48 hours.

A representative of the Muslim community stated that Muslims faced increasing difficulties in finding suitable burial grounds for their adherents, since a cemetery they had used for these purposes in Bratislava had reached its maximum capacity, and the city council had not provided a new suitable location that would allow funeral services and burial according to Islamic traditions. They also said the lack of registration meant it was much more difficult to establish a mosque in the country; they pointed to the rejection of an application to build a mosque and cultural center years earlier by the then-mayor of Bratislava, who had cited the lack of registration as one reason for the rejection. Although Muslims had registered as a civic association, they continued to state that the lack of recognition as a religious group made obtaining the necessary construction permits for other sites for religious worship such as prayer rooms more difficult. They said the officials would seek technical grounds, such as zoning regulations, to reject their applications or fail to act on them.

The government increased its annual state subsidies to the 18 registered religious groups to approximately 51.7 million euros (\$63.44 million), compared with 47.5

million euros (\$58.28 million) in 2019. Up to 80 percent of each group's subsidy was used to pay the group's clergy and operating costs.

Some members of religious groups continued to state their groups' reliance on direct government funding limited their independence and religious freedom, and they said religious groups self-censored potential criticism of the government on sensitive topics to avoid jeopardizing their relationship with the state and, consequently, their finances. There were no reports, however, that the government arbitrarily altered the amount of subsidies provided to individual religious groups.

The Ministry of Culture's cultural grant program continued to allocate funding for the upkeep of religious monuments and cultural heritage sites owned by religious groups. In 2019, the ministry allocated 6.5 million euros (\$7.98 million) for these purposes, compared with 5.1 million euros (\$6.26 million) in 2018.

Many political parties, including the largest opposition party in parliament, Smer-SD, continued to express anti-Muslim views in their public statements, and leaders from across the political spectrum engaged in rhetoric portraying refugees and Muslims as a threat to society in their messaging ahead of the February parliamentary election.

In January, former Prime Minister and Smer-SD chair Robert Fico stated he did not want a "compact Muslim community" in the country and that he did not want "these people" to change its character. Fico also stated that his party was principally against "hauling in migrants," a comment he made after former President and Za ludi Party chair Andrej Kiska said on television that the country was successful and "could afford to help a couple [of] hundred, perhaps [a] thousand people, fleeing from war and violence." Also in January, Smer-SD released a cartoon campaign video mocking former President Kiska and Za ludi and stating that Kiska and his party intended to introduce legislation requiring each family in the country take in one migrant family, while using what experts described as "anti-migrant and anti-Muslim imagery." Za ludi denied the allegations, and there were media reports stating they were false.

In February, Richard Sulik, Freedom and Solidarity coalition chair and later Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister, wrote on his blog that his party viewed Islam as "incompatible with [Slovak] culture" and that "in Islam ... [p]edophilia, polygamy, and several other norms are in stark conflict to our rules."

Anti-Muslim rhetoric also featured prominently in the parliamentary election campaigns of parties that the media and political commentators described as extremist, including the LSNS and the Vlast (“Homeland”) Party of former Supreme Court judge Stefan Harabin. During a rally in December 2019, LSNS chair Marian Kotleba said his party would never allow Slovakia to become a “multicultural pig sty like Western countries,” and he stated that non-Christian citizens in Germany pressured local governments to limit or outright ban Christmas celebrations, including the public display of Christmas trees. The Priama demokracia (Direct Democracy) party, which ran on the LSNS ticket, stated in its program that it aimed to “stop the Islamic invasion into Europe” and stressed that “Islam must never become even a small part of [Slovak] culture.”

Throughout the campaign, the Vlast Party included a survey on its website asking voters whether they approved of the country supporting other religions, for example Islam, in the context of migration. Below the question there were the statements, “Practice has shown that such different entities [i.e., Islam and Christianity] cannot successfully connect, which leads to conflicts,” and “Slovakia must remain a Christian country!”

Representatives of the LSNS party, which received 7.97 percent of the vote in the February parliamentary election and secured 17 of 150 seats in parliament, continued to make anti-Semitic statements and faced criminal prosecution for past statements. Party members and supporters frequently glorified the Nazi-allied WWII-era fascist government and its leaders and downplayed the role of that regime in wartime atrocities.

In October, the Specialized Criminal Court convicted LSNS chairman Marian Kotleba of supporting and promoting groups aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms for a 2017 ceremony in which he gave three checks, each worth 1,488 euros (\$1,800), to families with children with disabilities. Prosecution experts testified the amount was a well-known neo-Nazi cypher that represented the white supremacist “14-word” slogan and a numerical representation of “Heil Hitler.” Witnesses also testified that organizers played the unofficial anthem of the Nazi-allied wartime Slovak State at the ceremony and that the event was held on March 14, the anniversary of the founding of that Slovak State. The ceremony ended with a concert by singer Reborn, widely considered a neo-Nazi, who also faced prosecution on extremism charges. The court sentenced Kotleba to four years and four months in prison. The defense appealed to the Supreme Court and the case remained pending at year’s end.

In August, the National Criminal Agency (NAKA) announced it would bring extremism-related charges against nine persons suspected of disseminating extremist materials and collecting Nazi paraphernalia. Three members of the musical group *Kratky Proces* (“Short Process”) were taken into custody during related police raids on charges of producing an extremist musical album. The detained singer of the well-known band, who also repeatedly was an LSNS candidate for office, faced three to eight years in prison if convicted.

In May, former LSNS candidate Marian Magat, whom the media labelled a far-right extremist, published a blog questioning the existence of the Holocaust on the internet outlet *Kulturblog*. The National Criminal Agency opened an investigation on suspicion of denying the crimes of totalitarian regimes, which carries a sentence of up to three years in prison. The case remained pending.

In January, the Specialized Criminal Court convicted LSNS regional chairman Anton Grno of supporting a movement aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms for shouting the greeting of the World War II-era Slovak fascist state’s paramilitary force during a 2018 Supreme Court hearing. Grno was ordered to pay a 5,000-euro (\$6,100) fine or, if he failed to pay, a six-month prison sentence. Media reported that Grno’s social media profiles contained several openly racist and anti-Semitic posts.

In March, on the 81st anniversary of the founding of the wartime Slovak State, which deported more than 70,000 of its citizens to Nazi extermination camps, the *Slovenske hnutie obrody SHO* (Slovak Renewal Movement), a far-right political party which ran in the 2020 parliamentary election but whose candidates were not elected, organized a commemoration of the creation of that state, laying wreaths at a statue of Jozef Tiso, the state’s president, in the village of *Cajakovce*.

In February, 12 major human rights organizations working with refugees, migrants, and religious minorities, including the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, penned an open letter to politicians urging them to refrain from spreading unfounded fear of migrants, using dehumanizing statements against migrants and refugees, and calling for consistency and caution in the use of migration-related terms.

In January, President Zuzana Caputova met with representatives of the Roman Catholic, Augsburg Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformed Christian Churches and the Central Association of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic to discuss the state of religious freedom and tolerance in society and to thank them for their service to the religious community and their charitable

work. Representatives of unregistered churches and religious communities were not invited to the meeting.

In September, President Caputova, Prime Minister Igor Matovic, and several cabinet ministers commemorated Slovak Holocaust and Ethnic Violence Remembrance Day by laying wreaths at the Holocaust memorials in Bratislava and Sered. In her speech on the occasion, Caputova said it was the duty of all people to remember what preceded the Holocaust so that all manifestations of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination would be rejected and condemned from the outset.

In January, President Caputova attended the Fifth World Holocaust Forum in Israel held on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Caputova highlighted that racial hatred always starts with words and cautioned against increasing hatred over the internet and discrimination against some parts of the population.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In January, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia reported an assault against a Syrian student on a public bus in Bratislava. A man reportedly violently shoved a student standing next to him after the student said the Islamic greeting, “As-salamu alaykum” (peace be with you) in a telephone conversation. The man reportedly attempted to renew his assault, but the student defended himself and exited the bus at the next stop. Bystanders reportedly did not react to the altercation, and the student did not report the incident to the authorities.

A representative of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia stated the Muslim community continued to encounter difficulties altering negative public attitudes partly because of the social stigma associated with not having the same legal benefits accorded to registered religious groups. Representatives of other unregistered religious groups, including the Church of Scientology and Christian Fellowship Grace, also stated that the public tended to view their activities with mistrust and perceive them as “fringe cults” because of their lack of official government recognition as a religious community.

The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia again reported continued online hate speech toward Muslims and refugees, which it attributed mostly to the social controversy ensuing from the 2015 European migration crisis and inflammatory anti-Muslim public statements by local politicians. Hate speech, mostly on social media, again

included frequent portrayal of Muslims as “savages,” “barbarians,” “terrorists,” and a “threat to European culture and way of life,” as well as calls for violence against refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa, many of whom were believed to be Muslim. Muslim community leaders said they continued to perceive increased anti-Muslim sentiment compared with 2015 and earlier, and they continued to maintain a low profile regarding their activities and prayer rooms to avoid inflaming public opinion.

Police reported seven cases of defamation of race, nation, or religious belief and nine cases of incitement of national, racial, and ethnic hatred in the first eight months of the year, compared with 13 cases of defamation and seven cases of incitement of hatred in all of 2019. Police provided no further details.

According to a regional study by Bratislava-based think tank GLOBSEC released in August, 51 percent of Slovaks tended to believe Jews had too much power and were secretly controlling governments and institutions around the world. The same study also showed that 53 percent of respondents believed that antigovernment protests in 2018 launched in the aftermath of the killing of an investigative journalist and his fiancée were orchestrated and financially supported by a Jewish American financier.

A survey conducted in June by pollster Focus for the Milan Simecka Foundation, a local NGO, found a majority of respondents would consider it “completely unacceptable” or “rather unacceptable” for a Muslim or a foreigner from a majority-Muslim country (the precise percentage varied by country of origin cited) to move into their neighborhood, compared to 32 percent if the neighbor were from the United States. According to the survey, more than 70 percent of citizens would find it unacceptable if a Muslim from Saudi Arabia moved into their neighborhood. More than half (53 percent) of respondents indicated they would consider it “completely unacceptable,” and a further 24 percent “rather unacceptable,” if their adult child married a Muslim. The NGO interpreted the results of the survey as demonstrating that societal acceptance of and tolerance toward foreigners and non-Christians, particularly Muslims and persons from Arab, African, and Middle Eastern countries, remained limited and appeared to be decreasing. A 2008 edition of the survey found that at that time, 32 percent of respondents would consider it unacceptable if a Muslim moved into their neighborhood.

Sociologists and Jewish community leaders said they perceived anti-Semitism was increasing, citing repeated references by public officials to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, increased electoral support for LSNS, the desecration of a Jewish

cemetery in December 2019, and polling trends that found a steadily growing share of the population would have an issue with a Jewish family moving into their neighborhood.

Organizations the media characterized as far right – including the civic organizations Museum of the Slovak Armed Forces 1939-1945 and the Slovak Historical Society – continued to publish material and issue statements praising the anti-Semitic, Nazi-allied Slovak State government and organize gatherings in which participants displayed symbols of that government and wore its uniforms. Organizers often included photographs showing WWII symbols, such as the double-barred equal-armed cross or photographs of President Tiso in online posts promoting their events. In March, on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of the founding of the Slovak State and in April on the 73rd anniversary of the execution of Tiso, the Aliancia za nedelu (“Alliance for Sunday”), a Christian civic association, posted articles on its website downplaying the crimes of that regime and its leadership and rejecting the responsibility of the government of the Slovak State for deporting the Jewish population to Nazi extermination camps.

At year’s end, the Supreme Court had not ruled on a criminal case involving a man who attacked the Turkish and Albanian proprietors of a kebab bistro in Banska Bystrica in 2018, shouting anti-Muslim slurs and threatening to kill all Muslims. In 2019, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced the man to four years in prison after the judge reduced the charge from attempted murder aggravated by a deliberate extremist motive, punishable by a prison sentence of up to 21 years to one of inflicting bodily harm. The prosecutor appealed the verdict to the Supreme Court.

In January, police closed the investigation into the December 2019 desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the town of Rajec after it found that the acts of vandalism were committed by five local boys aged nine to 12 years who, it concluded, did not act with anti-Semitic hate motives. At year’s end, police continued to investigate an unrelated December 2019 incident during which unknown persons knocked over 60 gravestones in the Jewish cemetery in the city of Namestovo, but they reportedly had no leads. The local Pamataj (“Remember”) civic association commenced work on restoring the damaged cemetery, using funds collected through a crowdsourcing campaign, among other resources.

The Parliament of the World’s Religions, a local NGO, continued to organize a series of public debates and school lectures with a variety of religious leaders from

the Jewish, Muslim, Augsburg Lutheran, and Roman Catholic communities to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy officers repeatedly raised the treatment of religious minority groups and the continued presence of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiment with government officials, including the Minister of Culture, who oversees relations between the state and religious communities, officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Speaker of Parliament, and lawmakers from across the political spectrum. Embassy officers continued to express to government officials their concerns that requiring religious groups to have 50,000 members in order to register impeded these groups from having the rights and benefits accruing from official recognition.

In September, the Ambassador organized an interfaith discussion with representatives of the country's registered and unregistered churches and religious communities, including Roman Catholic, Augsburg Lutheran, and Muslim, and a representative of the Ministry of Culture, to discuss religious freedom, tolerance, interfaith relations, and the impact of COVID-19 on religious practice and services. The embassy highlighted the main messages of the discussion through its social media channels.

The embassy used its social media channels to commemorate Slovak Holocaust Remembrance Day and International Religious Freedom Day. In September, the Ambassador laid a wreath at the Holocaust Memorial in Bratislava and recorded a video message commemorating the victims of the Holocaust and urging the public to stand up against all forms of hatred and discrimination to prevent the tragic past from repeating itself. In August, the Ambassador participated in a hike commemorating the courage of two Jewish children who hid in the wilderness of central Slovakia to avoid capture by the Nazis during World War II. The Ambassador participated in a television interview highlighting the issue, and the embassy further amplified the event on social media. In January, a senior embassy representative visited the desecrated Jewish cemetery in the town of Namestovo and condemned vandalism and all forms of hatred, bigotry, and bias against religious and ethnic minorities. Also in January, the Ambassador visited the Sereď Holocaust Museum, meeting with its director.

Embassy officers met with registered and unregistered religious organizations, including the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, and civil society groups, including

the Forum of World's Religions, to raise the issue of hate speech directed against Muslims, anti-Semitism, the impact of COVID-19 on religious services, and the negative impact on religious minorities of membership and other registration requirements.