

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and each of the country's two entities – the Federation of BiH (the Federation) and Republika Srpska (RS) – provide for freedom of religious thought and practice, prohibit religious discrimination, and allow registered religious organizations to operate freely. The self-governing Brčko District follows a national law on religious freedom. The Federation constitution declares religion to be “a vital national interest” of the constituent peoples. The RS constitution establishes the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) as “the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion.” The BiH constitution reserves all positions in the three-member Presidency and one house of parliament to members of the three major ethnic groups, known as “constituent peoples” – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – who are predominantly Muslim, Roman Catholic, and SOC, respectively. Jews and other minorities are unable to serve in those positions.

The government again failed to comply with a 2009 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision calling on it to open positions in the Presidency and the House of Peoples in the parliament to ethnic groups other than the three constituent peoples, although political leaders engaged in talks on a package of electoral and limited constitutional reforms that, according to international experts, would have implemented the court's decision. The negotiations ended in March, however, with no agreement. According to Vrhbosna Catholic Archbishop Tomo Vukšić and SOC Metropolitan of Dabar Bosnia Hrizostom, the government made no effort during the year to approve the reestablishment of two joint commissions required to implement agreements between the state and the Catholic Church and the SOC. In May, Catholic bishops issued a statement criticizing the government for its failure to do so. Religious groups reported no progress in efforts to obtain restitution for property confiscated during the communist period. According to government officials, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) failed to implement key provisions of a national religious freedom law dealing with pensions, disability allowances, and health insurance for religious officials, despite pledging to do so in the instruction for implementation of the law in 2019. The BiH Presidency again failed to consider

an agreement with the Islamic Community that would provide religious accommodations to Muslim workers. Religious groups, in communities where they are a minority, again reported authorities discriminated against them by failing to protect their ability to exercise religious rights. For example, the Islamic Community in Mostar, where it is a minority religious group, reported that Neum municipal authorities in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton consistently refused to issue a permit to expand the current mosque in the village of Rabrani. There was, however, movement on several long-standing disputes involving houses of worship and cemeteries. The case of a Ministry of Defense employee who was prohibited from wearing a headscarf at work was pending with the Constitutional Court at year's end. Religious groups again reported that authorities did not adequately investigate and prosecute religiously motivated crimes.

There were reports throughout the year of attacks, harassment, and intimidation targeting members of the country's various religious groups, including vandalism against Jewish property. The BiH Interreligious Council (IRC) registered 15 acts of vandalism of religious buildings and cemeteries and two incidents against religious officials. The IRC said, however, that the number of actual incidents was likely much higher, but that religious communities did not report all the incidents, partly because attacks were rarely efficiently prosecuted and perpetrators were almost never adequately punished. On January 6 – Orthodox Christmas Eve – five youths drove by a mosque in Janja, Bijeljina municipality and harassed and intimidated Muslim worshippers, firing shots into the air. In June, unidentified individuals damaged the facade of the Jewish synagogue in Zenica. In July, in Mostar, unidentified individuals desecrated the Vihovići Orthodox cemetery. In September, unknown individuals desecrated and damaged Catholic stations of the cross in Drijenča, Čelić municipality. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) mission to the country, in 2021 (the most recent year for which data were available), courts adjudicated four cases involving religiously motivated incidents from 2021 and earlier. The OSCE reported 18 incidents targeting Muslims in 2021, 13 targeting Catholics, 15 targeting Orthodox Christians, and three targeting Jews. The incidents, all of which were reported to police, included threats against religious believers and officials, disturbances of religious ceremonies, vandalism of religious sites, and desecration of graveyards. In March, the Commission for Freedom of Religion of the Islamic Community (Islamic Community Commission) issued its 2021 report on alleged violations of

the right to freedom of religion of Muslims in the country, which cited 21 registered cases.

U.S. embassy officials engaged with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity, and municipal authorities as well as religious leaders and communities to promote respect for religious diversity, press for equal treatment for religious minorities, and encourage a greater role for religious communities in fostering reconciliation and mutual understanding. In April and July, the Ambassador met separately with the leaders of the Islamic Community, Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Jewish Community to discuss interreligious dialogue and reconciliation. In April, the Ambassador led a delegation of international community members to commemorate victims of Donja Gradina, a killing ground of the Jasenovac concentration camp, and emphasized tolerance and the importance of interreligious dialogue at an iftar he hosted. In January, a senior embassy official commemorated Holocaust Remembrance by laying flowers at the Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo. In regular meetings with religious groups, embassy officials continued to urge the groups to improve interreligious dialogue to help develop a peaceful and stable society. The embassy continued to maintain regular contact with the IRC and fund some of its interfaith and reconciliation-themed activities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 3.8 million (midyear 2022). According to the most recent census, conducted in 2013, Sunni Muslims constitute approximately 51 percent of the population, Serbian Orthodox Christians 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, and others, including Protestants and Jews, 3 percent.

There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion: ethnic Serbs affiliate primarily with the SOC, and ethnic Croats with the Catholic Church. Bosniaks are predominantly Muslim. The Jewish Community of BiH estimates it has 1,000 members, with the majority living in Sarajevo. The majority of Serbian Orthodox live in the RS, and most Muslims and Catholics in the Federation. Protestant and most other small religious communities have their largest number of adherents in Sarajevo and Banja Luka.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

Annex IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which serves as the country's constitution, provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It stipulates no one shall be deprived of citizenship on the grounds of religion and that all persons shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms without discrimination as to religion.

The entity constitution of the Federation states all individuals shall have freedom of religion, including of public and private worship, and freedom from discrimination based on religion or creed. It defines religion as a vital national interest of the constituent peoples.

The entity constitution of the RS establishes the SOC as "the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion." It provides for equal freedoms, rights, and duties for all citizens irrespective of religion and prohibits any incitement to religious hatred or intolerance. It specifies religious communities shall be equal before the law and free to manage their religious affairs and hold religious services, open religious schools and conduct religious education in all schools, engage in commercial activities, receive gifts, and establish and manage endowments in accordance with the law.

A national law on religion provides for freedom of conscience and grants legal status to "churches and religious communities." To acquire official status as a recognized religious community, religious groups must register. The constitutions of BiH, the Federation entity, and the RS entity state that registered religious organizations are allowed to operate freely.

The self-governing Brčko District follows the national law on religious freedom.

Unregistered religious groups may assemble to practice their religion, but they have no legal status and may not represent themselves as a religious community.

Registration affords numerous rights to religious communities that are not available to those that do not register, including the right to conduct collaborative

actions such as charity work, fundraising, and constructing and occupying places of worship. The law states churches and religious communities serve as representative institutions and organizations of believers, founded in accordance with their own regulations, teachings, beliefs, traditions, and practices. The law recognizes the legal status of four “traditional” religious communities: the Islamic Community, SOC, Catholic Church, and Jewish Community. The Ministry of Justice maintains a unified register of all religious communities, and the MHRR is responsible for documenting violations of religious freedom.

According to law, any group of 300 or more adult citizens may apply to register a new religious community (defined as non-Christian) or church through a written application to the Ministry of Justice. Requirements for registration include presenting statutes that define the method of religious practice and a petition for establishment with the signatures of at least 30 founders. The ministry must issue a decision within 30 days of receipt of the application. The law stipulates the ministry may deny the application for registration if it concludes the content and manner of worship may be “contrary to legal order, public morale, or is damaging to the life and health or other rights and freedoms of believers and citizens.” A group may appeal a negative decision to the national-level Council of Ministers. The law allows registered religious communities to establish their own suborganizations, which may operate without restriction.

The law states that no new church or religious community may be founded bearing the same or similar name as an existing church or religious community. The law also states no one may use the symbols, insignia, or attributes of a church or a religious community without its consent.

In addition to registered churches and religious communities, there are educational, charitable, and other institutions, known as “legal subjects,” that belong to these communities but are registered as separate legal entities in the Ministry of Justice registry. The Islamic Community has 120 legal subjects, the Catholic Church 401, the Orthodox Church 546, the Jewish Community eight, and other churches and religious communities and alliances (primarily of Protestant groups) have 50.

Pursuant to a 2015 decision of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, employees of judicial institutions are prohibited from wearing any form of

religious insignia in the workplace, defined as including headscarves, or practicing religion, such as by praying or proselytizing, at work.

The state recognizes the Islamic Community as the sole supreme institutional religious authority for all Muslims in the country, including immigrants and refugees, as well as for Bosniaks and other Muslim nationals living outside the country who accept the Islamic Community's authority. According to the law, no Islamic group may register with the Ministry of Justice or open a mosque without the permission of the Islamic Community.

The law on religion states that churches and religious communities must pay taxes and contributions on earnings of their employees (pension, health, and disability insurance). In the Federation, all 10 cantons include religious officials in their health insurance system, the modalities of which vary from canton to canton. For example, Sarajevo Canton does not include religious workers in its health insurance system but offers such insurance to religious officials under more favorable provisions than those available to other citizens. The RS provides pension benefits and disability insurance to SOC religious workers while they have residence there.

The criminal codes of all three BiH administrative units regulate hate crimes. The provisions in these codes define hate crimes as any criminal act committed because of religious belief or various other factors. The criminal codes also stipulate that these motivations be considered aggravating circumstances of a criminal act unless the code itself stipulates harsher punishments.

The law on religious freedom, the framework state-level law on elementary and high school education, and laws of each of the 10 Federation cantons and the RS affirm the right of every citizen to religious education, recognizing the parents' right to have religious education for their children in public schools and preschools. Confessional religious education has the status of an elective school subject, but once a student chooses it at an early grade level, he or she must continue with religious education until graduation. Parents may opt for an ethics course instead of religion classes. If a school does not offer an ethics course, students may simply opt out of religious education. Religious communities train and provide accreditation to respective religious education teachers, who are selected and employed by the schools where they will teach.

The Islamic Community, SOC, and Catholic Church develop and approve religious curricula across the country.

In the Federation's five Bosniak-majority cantons, primary and secondary schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a twice-weekly course, except in Sarajevo Canton where the course is offered once per week. Alternatively, students may take a course in ethics. In cantons with Croat majorities, Croat students in primary and secondary schools may attend an elective Catholic religion course twice a week or take a course in ethics. In Sarajevo Canton, the Ministry of Education offers Orthodox, Protestant, Islamic, and Catholic religious education. The RS Ministry of Education offers elective Orthodox religious education in elementary and secondary schools, but students have the option to take a course in ethics instead. In both the RS and the Federation, as well as Brčko, students belonging to a registered religious community that is a minority in the school may enroll in a course pertaining to that religious community if there are at least 18 interested students.

The state constitution provides for representation of the three major ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – in the government and armed forces. The constitution makes no explicit mention of representation for religious groups, although each ethnicity mentioned by the constitution is associated with a particular religious group.

The state constitution reserves all positions in the House of Peoples (one of two houses of parliament) for members of the three major ethnic groups according to quotas based on their ethnicity only. The Law on the Council of Ministers apportions seats among the three groups. The three-member Presidency must consist of one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb.

A law against discrimination prohibits exclusion, limitation, or preferential treatment of individuals based specifically on religion in employment and the provision of social services in both the government and private sectors.

The country has no law on restitution that would allow for the return of, or compensation for, property, including property owned by religious groups, nationalized or expropriated under communist rule.

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

Government Practices

According to government officials, key provisions of a set of instructions pertaining to the religious freedom law issued in 2019 remained unimplemented. The officials said that during the year, the MHRR addressed the rights of students attending religious schools to receive the same benefits as other students, including free public transportation and student housing. The MHRR also enforced a rule requiring religious organizations' permission for the public use of names, symbols, and signs associated with their organization by individuals or other groups. The officials said, however, that the ministry took no steps to facilitate the resolution of pension, disability allowance, and health insurance issues for religious officials, despite pledging to do so in 2019. The Federation, RS, and Brčko governments did not make provisions for religious officials to qualify fully for pensions and health and disability insurance, although the MHRR asked them in 2019 to work with religious group representatives to do so. Instead, religious communities were forced to make their own arrangements within different administrative units of the country. For example, in the absence of systemic solutions, the Islamic Community independently provided health benefits and pensions for its religious workers, while the RS paid those benefits to SOC religious workers in the RS.

In its report covering 2021 and issued in March, the Islamic Community Commission, composed of Islamic Community members and chaired by Goražde Mufti Remzija Pitić, stated that the continued use of Orthodox symbols and iconography in public institutions in the RS, including schools, violated the principle of separation of religion and state as well as the principle of equality of all religious communities and churches before the law. The commission also cited and criticized the practice of asking Muslim children enrolled in public schools in the RS to participate in celebrations of the January 27 Orthodox holiday of St. Sava, the Serbian Orthodox patron saint of schools.

The Islamic Community Commission also highlighted in its 2021 report the rhetoric of Serb then member of BiH Presidency Milorad Dodik, who referred to Bosniaks as "Muslims," which the report said reduced the ethnicity to a religious

group, while not mentioning religious affiliation when referring to Croats and Serbs.

The Ministry of Justice said it generally processed registration applications by religious groups within a week and that no religious group reported delays in registration. No new groups registered during the year, and there were no reports the ministry denied any registration applications by religious communities.

During the year, the BiH Presidency failed to consider an agreement drafted in 2015 between the state and the Islamic Community that, if approved by the Presidency and parliament, would recognize and regulate Islamic dietary restrictions in public institutions, public and private sector employee accommodations for daily prayer, and time off to attend Friday prayers as well as one-time travel to Mecca for the Hajj. According to an Islamic Community official, the BiH Presidency did not take the agreement up for consideration due to opposition by Serb then member of the BiH Presidency Milorad Dodik, who blocked consideration of the agreement during his tenure from November 2018 to November 2022 and publicly stated that the agreement would grant greater rights to Muslims than to other religious groups. The Islamic Community official disagreed with Dodik's assertion. The Islamic Community Commission report for 2021 stated that failure to consider and approve the agreement constituted discrimination against Muslims and their religious rights. The report also said that delaying and blocking the process of harmonizing the draft agreement had a negative impact on freedom of religion and discriminated against the Islamic Community and Muslims, in contrast to the other two main religious communities – the Serb Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church – both of which have agreements with the national government in place, although they are not being implemented.

Throughout its term from 2018 to December 2022, the national government did not reestablish the joint commission with the Catholic Church to implement the concordat with the Holy See, a requirement after each change in government. The government and the Catholic Church nominated members for the commission, but the BiH Council of Ministers had not approved the commission as of year's end. Similarly, the government did not reestablish a joint commission to implement its agreement with the SOC.

According to representatives of the Catholic Church, the failure to form the concordat commission and the nonimplementation of the agreement continued to affect pastoral care by the church in hospitals, work with police services and prisons, availability of health insurance for church workers, restitution of confiscated property, compensation for the use of confiscated property, availability of tax exemptions regarding the nonprofit activities of church legal entities, the financing of school and charitable church institutions, the legal status of in-kind donations to the church, and other issues. Following the May session of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing the country's Catholic bishops, the bishops issued a statement noting that the government had not implemented any part of the signed agreement and that there were no signs that the agreement would be implemented. The bishops stated that ignoring and failing to implement an international agreement reflected the attitude of the national government toward Catholics and the Catholic Church.

The case of Emela Mujanović Kapidžija, who in 2021 filed a suit in court alleging discrimination and violation of religious freedom after the Ministry of Defense prohibited her from wearing a headscarf at work, remained pending with the national Constitutional Court at year's end. In May 2021, the Islamic Community filed an appeal on Kapidžija's behalf with the Constitutional Court following the rejection of her appeal by the national Appellate Chamber of a lower court's ruling against her complaint. Kapidžija remained a member of the armed forces but was not permitted to wear a headscarf at her workplace at the Ministry of Defense pending a ruling by the Constitutional Court.

Leaders of the four traditional religious communities in the country continued to say the lack of a national law on restitution, for both religious communities and private citizens, hindered efforts of religious communities to resolve claims of properties confiscated under communist rule from 1946 to 1965. President of the BiH Jewish Community Jakob Finci said on November 21 that restitution remained an important issue and a condition for EU accession, but that it remained stuck for "no reason." He added that the country was the only one in the region that had made no progress on restitution legislation and implementation. International experts on restitution said they saw the view of RS entity officials that restitution and property issues were the competency of entities rather than the state as a major obstacle to the passage of a framework state-level law on restitution. They also stated that in the absence of a restitution law at the state

level, the return of property remained at the discretion of local authorities, and, even if authorities returned properties, the claimants could not receive title. A study conducted by the University of Sarajevo in 2006 estimated that 7 percent of restitution claims involved property that belonged to religious communities. All religious communities stated that the absence of restitution legislation continued to make religious communities dependent on local municipalities that own the religious buildings and could make decisions on whether to allow religious communities to use, renovate, or expand the properties.

In July, SOC Metropolitan Hrizostom told the SRNA news agency that life for Orthodox believers in the Federation entity (where predominantly Muslim Bosniaks and predominantly Catholic Croats are the majority) was difficult and that they were subject to segregation and discrimination, as local communities in which they lived failed to respect their rights, in comparison with believers of other churches and religious communities. He also said that for more than two decades Federation authorities had failed to return an Orthodox seminary building in Sarajevo to the SOC.

The Islamic Community in Mostar reported that Neum municipal authorities refused to issue a permit to expand a mosque in Rabrani village, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. For two years, the Islamic Community sought to expand the building to accommodate the needs of the small but growing number of believers in the predominantly Catholic Croat community. The Islamic Community proceeded with construction despite not receiving a permit, stating that numerous Catholic buildings in the region had been built without permits. In November, the Islamic Community reported that municipal authorities said that the construction work on the mosque was illegal and threatened to demolish the additions, despite consistently refusing to issue the permit for a remodel in response to multiple requests by the Islamic Community. Neum municipal authorities, reportedly accompanied by police, conducted numerous inspections of the building, and police questioned the members of the small Islamic community in Rabrani. By year's end, municipal authorities had roped off the entrance to the mosque but had not demolished the additions. Muslim community members reportedly removed the rope and were accessing the facilities.

On February 23, the Constitutional Court of BiH ruled in favor of the Islamic Community's appeal of a 2021 decision by the city administration of Tuzla to issue a construction permit for business facilities on Islamic Community land endowed to it by community members. The Constitutional Court subsequently annulled the decision of the Tuzla Municipal Court to transfer the property, and construction, which was well underway, was halted. The case was returned to the municipal court for a new hearing in which the Islamic Community and Tuzla city administration will have the opportunity to present their cases.

In September, the OSCE mission reported that local authorities agreed to establish a new Islamic cemetery in Stolac, which, if implemented, would resolve a long-pending issue there. The OSCE also reported that in October 2021, the Brčko District Assembly adopted a draft law on public property, which the OSCE said would facilitate the expansion of cemetery space, an issue affecting all local religious communities in Brčko District.

In July, the Franciscan Province of Bosna Srebrena resolved its decades-long dispute with local authorities concerning the renovation of a section of the historic Saint Cross Franciscan Monastery in the Novo Sarajevo municipality, which was confiscated by the government after World War II and damaged during the 1992-1995 war. Following the war, municipal authorities, who continued to own the monastery building, gave a permit to the Franciscan friars to restore two-thirds of the building, which according to the mayor was all the Franciscans' resources could cover at that time. Once those portions of the building were renovated and more resources became available, the Franciscans applied for a permit to renovate the remaining third of the building. The Novo Sarajevo municipal administration, however, rejected the subsequent requests for renovation, and the unrenovated monastery section was in an extremely poor condition, requiring urgent repairs to become usable. On July 21, the Franciscans signed an agreement with municipal authorities to complete the restoration of the last section. During the signing, Novo Sarajevo Mayor Hasan Tanović recognized the importance of the Franciscans' work in the country and expressed regret for what he said was the years of obstruction by the former municipal administration.

The OSCE noted little progress in implementing court rulings requiring schools to use a common curriculum, ensure that students are educated in their own

language, and end the practice of segregating students according to ethnicity. On February 28, the Kotor Varoš Basic Court fined the Saint Sava school in Vrbanjci 1,000 convertible marks (KM) (\$550) and the school principal KM 500 (\$275) for nonimplementation of a 2019 court decision requiring that students at a school in Vrbanjci, Kotor Varoš, receive instruction in the national group of subjects and in the Bosnian language. As a result, 60 children continued to lack access to education in their own language in RS entity public schools and therefore attended classes at the Hanifići Islamic Center. Teachers who taught in that school traveled from the Federation entity-based Zenica-Doboj Canton schools, and in some cases from Sarajevo Canton schools.

According to nongovernmental organizations and media reports, parents of different faiths throughout the country continued to send their children to public school religious education classes to avoid exposing their children to peer pressure by having them stand out from other children who attended the classes.

A representative of the Islamic Community responsible for education reported that school authorities across the country sought to enable children to have access to religious education, even if the number of children of a minority religion was smaller than the minimum the regulations required for a class in that religion. Among reported instances of discrimination, the Islamic community in the Croat-majority municipality of Usora in Zenica-Doboj Canton said secondary school students, some of whom were Muslim, were asked to enroll in religious education at the beginning of school year, without school authorities making it clear that only Catholic religious education was being offered.

The government again failed to comply with a 2009 ruling by the ECHR stating the country should amend its constitution to allow members of minority groups, including Jews, to run for the Presidency and the House of Peoples of the BiH parliament. Through March, national political leaders were engaged in negotiations on a package of electoral and limited constitutional reforms that according to international experts would have included implementation of the court's decision, but the negotiations ended without agreement. On September 21, Jakob Finci, one of the appellants, said in an interview that the 2009 ruling was supposed to make all citizens and peoples of the country equal, including, not only Jews and Roma, but also 400,000 citizens who declared themselves as Bosnians and Herzegovinians and not as Croats, Bosniaks, or Serbs.

According to the Muslim, Catholic, and Serb Orthodox religious communities, authorities continued to discriminate against them and enforce selectively the rights of religious groups regarding access to education, language, employment, health care, and other social services in areas where those groups constituted religious minorities. They said refugees returning to their original communities pursuant to the Dayton Peace Agreement were particularly subject to discrimination. In May, the head of the Islamic Community, Raisu-l-Ulama Husein Effendi Kavazović, told the media that imams in the RS entity faced administrative difficulties, such as the inability to access discrimination-free healthcare and education and to obtain permission from municipal authorities for renovation and construction of Islamic Community facilities, similar to other Bosniak returnees to that entity. “We have a systematic problem in the RS, where they [the authorities] are obstructing the life of Bosniaks” said Kavazović.

Religious leaders also continued to state that police were reluctant to investigate potential hate crimes targeting religious minority communities because law enforcement officials often represented and included only the members of the majority group. Leaders of the IRC, whose membership comprises the four traditional religious communities, said that local authorities throughout the country continued to discriminate in investigating threats of violence, harassment, and vandalism. IRC leaders said they were encouraged, however, that the police and prosecutors’ offices were classifying some incidents as felonies instead of misdemeanors, as they often had in the past. As in 2021, only a few cases of theft and vandalism were recorded. The IRC said law enforcement officials at times failed to investigate motives or take into consideration that the acts occurred at religious sites and could be categorized as hate crimes. The IRC said that almost all attacks happened to a group or individuals living in an area where they were in the minority. These communities often consisted of returned wartime refugees who did not have full access to other rights, including education and political representation by a member of their community, and who were otherwise vulnerable. In many cases, IRC leaders said they hesitated to report incidents to police or media, particularly in areas where their religious group was a minority, out of fear that public attention could result in retaliation or raise tensions in the community with deleterious effects on IRC members.

The RS government again failed to fulfill its financial commitments to support the IRC, while the national Council of Ministers and Brčko District continued to

provide the annual grant to the IRC from their respective budgets. In October, for the first time in 12 years, the Federation disbursed KM 50,000 (\$27,300) for the IRC budget. The commitments stemmed from memorandums of cooperation that the national government as well as the governments of the Federation and RS entities and the Brčko District concluded with the IRC in 2011. The memorandums stipulated annual contributions to the IRC budget of KM 100,000 (\$55,000) by the state, KM 50,000 (\$27,300) by the entities, and KM 20,000 (\$11,000) from Brčko District.

The OSCE mission reported observing an increase in religiously motivated incidents around religious holidays. In Srebrenica in the RS entity, local authorities removed a banner about the Islamic Eid al-Adha holiday. In Bužim, authorities removed a Christmas banner.

On July 14, the Mostar City Council adopted a decision to rename six streets that had been named after individuals who were members of the Ustasha, a fascist organization allied with the Nazis during World War II. According to reports, the council took the decision following significant public and international pressure. However, despite the Mostar City Council decision, the city administration had not changed the physical street name signs by year's end.

Although the 2015 decision of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council banning employees of judicial institutions from wearing religious insignia or engaging in religious practices at work remained in place, there were no reports of the decision being enforced during the year.

The OSCE mission reported potentially discriminatory acts or practices on the grounds of religion and belief, such as a ban on full-body swimsuits (burkini, worn by some Muslim women) at Pannonian Lake in Tuzla, which sparked numerous public reactions against the prohibition. The OSCE mission also stated that in the Sarajevo suburb of Vogošća, the local public swimming pool amended its rules to allow such swimsuits.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The IRC recorded two incidents of religious intolerance and hatred against religious officials and believers and 15 cases of vandalism against religious

buildings and cemeteries during the year, compared with three incidents against religious officials and 23 incidents of vandalism in 2021. Of the 15 incidents of vandalism, six targeted Islamic properties, seven Orthodox, one Catholic, and one Jewish. Because religion and ethnicity often are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many actions as solely based on religious identity.

The IRC again stated it believed the actual number of religiously motivated incidents against religious persons or buildings was much higher but that members of religious groups feared reporting them. The IRC also stated it lacked the staff, capacity, or funding to follow up in detail on every case, and therefore limited its activities to registering and condemning incidents.

In one of the two incidents against persons, on Orthodox Christmas Eve (January 6), a caravan of vehicles carrying Christmas trees passed by a mosque in Janja in Bijeljina municipality, and five or six young people in the caravan shouted insulting messages at a group of Muslims and their imam as they were leaving the mosque following morning prayer. The youths also fired guns in the air. According to the Janja Islamic Community, the persons involved were charged with misdemeanors and fined.

On July 10, vandals desecrated an Orthodox cemetery in the Mostar settlement of Vihovići, writing threatening graffiti offensive to the Serbian Orthodox community at the entrance of the cemetery. Citizens reported the incident to police, but no perpetrator was identified. Mostar Mayor Mario Kordić visited the site and said he was shocked by the incident and strongly condemned it. Catholic Croat and Orthodox Serb neighbors jointly removed the graffiti from the cemetery.

On June 27, an unknown individual or individuals threw paint on the Zenica synagogue. Authorities failed to identify any suspects.

On September 18, unknown vandals damaged six of 14 stations of the cross and destroyed several light stands in the Catholic parish of Saint Anthony of Padua in the village of Drijenča in Čelić municipality. Authorities failed to identify any suspects.

On December 7, Duško Kojić, the parish priest of the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of Holy Trinity in Mostar, reported that the church had been vandalized and

stated he feared for his and his community's safety. Someone stole electrical cable and damaged the fuse box, leaving the cathedral without lighting, bells, or clocks. Numerous officials condemned the incident, including Mostar Mufti Salem Effendi Dedović and Mayor Kordić, who visited the cathedral to express their support and solidarity and offer assistance. Media reports characterized the incident as a hate crime, although the damage was relatively minor, and there was no graffiti or damage to the altar, religious items, or documents.

In 2021 (the most recent year for which data are available), the OSCE mission recorded through its monitoring program 18 potentially religiously motivated incidents targeting Muslims, 13 targeting Catholics, 15 targeting Orthodox individuals, and three targeting Jews. In 2020, the comparable figures were 16 incidents targeting Muslims and 27 against Christians, including Catholics and Orthodox. The incidents, all of which were reported to police, included threats against religious believers and officials, disturbances of religious ceremonies, vandalism of religious sites, and desecration of graveyards.

According to the OSCE, in 2021, judicial institutions completed four court cases concerning potentially religiously motivated incidents that occurred in that year or earlier. Three cases were prosecuted as felonies not related to religious bias, and one case was processed as a misdemeanor offense. In one felony case, the municipal court in Travnik imposed a suspended sentence of six months' imprisonment on two males of Bosniak ethnicity who desecrated a monument to fallen Croat soldiers at a Catholic cemetery. In the second case, the municipal court in Kiseljak fined two male individuals of Croat ethnicity KM 1,000 (\$550) each for throwing beer bottles at a mosque. In a case involving theft from a Catholic Church facility, the Foča basic court sentenced one male of Serb ethnicity to three months' imprisonment through a plea bargain, while suspending investigation against the second suspect for lack of evidence. In an incident concerning a religiously based verbal assault on Christmas Eve in front of a Catholic church, Zenica police fined a young male of Bosniak ethnicity for violating public peace and order per the law on minor offenses.

During 2021, the Islamic Community Commission registered 21 incidents targeting Muslims, including eight cases of desecration of mosques, cemeteries, and other buildings of the Islamic Community; one case of verbal abuse; one physical attack; two attacks against Islamic educational institutions; and nine cases of online hate

speech and anti-Muslim language. The commission did not have information on whether any of the reported cases were investigated or prosecuted by law enforcement and judicial authorities.

The Council of Muftis of the Islamic Community said it was continuing efforts to persuade unregistered Islamic congregations (known as para-jamaats), which gathered predominantly Salafist followers and operated outside the purview of the Islamic Community, to cease what they described as “unsanctioned” religious practices and officially unite with the Islamic Community. The Islamic Community reported there continued to be 20 active para-jamaats in 2022. According to the Islamic Community, of these 20 groups, four had memberships consisting of up to 40 families, while other para-jamaats comprised only a handful of believers.

In August, Cardinal Vinko Puljić, the retired Archbishop of Vrhbosna, blessed and inaugurated a Catholic church built on the site of a 13th century church in the Central Bosnia Canton town of Bugojno. Husein Smajić, a Bosniak Muslim from Bugojno, personally financed construction of the church on land that belonged to him after he found archeological remains of the 13th century church there.

In Mandino Selo in Tomislavgrad, Muslims and Catholics jointly financed the construction of a mosque. The Prime Minister of the majority-Croat Canton 10 (Livno Canton), Ivan Vukadin; Tomislavgrad Mayor Ivan Buntić; and friars from the Franciscan Saint Michael Archangel Friary attended the ceremony and delivered remarks, welcoming the mosque’s construction and congratulating their Muslim neighbors on the inauguration of their new religious building.

On March 12 at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Sarajevo, Tomo Vukšić was enthroned as the new Archbishop of Vrhbosna. Representatives of the Islamic Community attended the ceremony. On the day before the ceremony, the head of the Islamic Community, Raisu-l-Ulama Husein Effendi Kavazović, attended a Mass at the cathedral, the first time he had taken part in a religious service there.

The IRC continued working on different projects through its 15 local chapters across the country, primarily focusing on youth and women. During the year, the IRC decided it would eventually establish five additional chapters in Mostar, Sanski Most, Zvornik, Sarajevo, and Jajce. IRC projects included publishing a calendar of joint religious holidays and cooperation on health care with

international donors. The IRC continued its program of monitoring attacks against religious communities and officials but, due to the lack of resources, limited its activities to registering and condemning the attacks rather than following up on each case and monitoring authorities' response. The organization also published a joint religious holidays calendar.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials engaged with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity and municipal authorities, as well as religious leaders and communities to promote respect for religious diversity, press for equal treatment for religious minorities, and encourage a greater role for religious communities in fostering reconciliation and mutual understanding. Embassy officials reiterated to government officials the need to adopt restitution legislation and the importance of concluding the agreement with the Islamic Community and implementing the agreements with the SOC and Catholic Church.

In August, in response to the refusal of local authorities to allow the expansion of a local mosque, the embassy sent a letter to the mayor of Neum, urging him to respect the rights of religious communities. The authorities had not issued a construction permit as of year's end.

In April and July, the Ambassador met separately with the leaders of the Islamic Community, Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Jewish Community. During these meetings, the Ambassador heard about the main challenges each of the communities faces and the current situation and prospects for future interreligious dialogue. The Ambassador called on the religious leaders to take a more active role in promoting mutual understanding and reconciliation.

In April, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith iftar, where he invited representatives of all religious communities and sent the message of the importance of overcoming differences to promote genuine reconciliation and religious tolerance.

In September, the Ambassador met with a group of Herzegovina religious leaders, including Catholic Bishop of Mostar-Duvno Petar Palić, Mostar Mufti Salem Effendi Dedović, and Orthodox Bishop Dimitrije, to discuss interreligious dialogue,

reconciliation, and the role religious leaders can play in fostering mutual understanding in Mostar, which continues to be deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines following the 1992-1995 war. The Ambassador encouraged the leaders to approve the establishment of an IRC chapter in Mostar.

In September, embassy officials met with Novo Sarajevo Mayor Hasan Tanović to thank him for his contribution to fostering mutual understanding by signing an agreement with the Franciscans to complete the restoration of the last section of a historic Franciscan monastery, which has been pending for over a decade, rendering the portion of the building uninhabitable. The embassy representatives presented Tanovic with a certificate to highlight his leadership in respecting the rights of religious minorities, a model that the embassy encouraged other officials throughout the country to emulate.

From May to October, embassy representatives successfully engaged with Federation officials to ensure they provided their agreed portion of financing for the IRC per the 2011 agreement. This helped provide financial stability to this important institution, which otherwise had struggled to maintain sufficient staff to complete reconciliation-themed projects.

In December, during a trip to Livno, the Ambassador met with Catholic nun Blanka Jeličić and Mualima (female religious teacher in Islam) Šejla Mujić, two community leaders working together on interreligious and interethnic cooperation through helping needy families and individuals in their communities.

In December, an embassy official attended a liturgy at the Mostar Serbian Orthodox Cathedral following an act of theft and vandalism that cut the cathedral's lighting and bells. The embassy expressed support for the Serbian Orthodox minority in Mostar and called on Mostar leaders to promptly investigate the incident and bring those responsible to justice.

On April 29, the Ambassador led a delegation that included the UK ambassador, High Representative Christian Schmidt, seven ambassadors of EU member states, and an EU delegation official to a commemoration at the Donja Gradina killing field, a component of the Jasenovac concentration camp across the Sava River in Croatia, which was operated by the Ustasha fascist regime from 1941 to 1945.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum estimated that the Ustasha killed 75,000 to 99,000 prisoners at the site, primarily Serb civilians but also Jews and others.

On January 27, a senior embassy official joined the local Jewish Community in marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, laying a wreath at the Jewish Cemetery Memorial in Sarajevo.

Throughout the year, embassy officials continued to hold meetings and host events with representatives of the Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. At these events, embassy officials emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue and respect for religious diversity and urged the religious communities to continue efforts to foster reconciliation, counter violent extremism related to religion, and condemn intolerance and hate speech.

The embassy reinforced the messages it conveyed at these events and meetings on its social media platforms; the postings, particularly on Twitter, included calls for tolerance and the importance of interreligious dialogue and reconciliation. The embassy used social media to condemn vandalism of religious buildings, including condemning the December 8 vandalism of the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Mostar, a national monument of BiH, and calling on law enforcement to investigate the crime and bring those responsible to justice. The embassy also highlighted the Ambassador's meetings with Mostar religious leaders on September 22 on social media, encouraging them to continue working on promoting dialogue and mutual respect. The messaging also focused on the Ambassador's individual meetings with the leaders of each religious community, recognizing their common issues, such as restitution and the role they can play in promoting mutual understanding.

A total of 80 students from three madrassahs (high schools run by the Islamic Community) and one segregated high school from diverse parts of the country participated in and successfully completed an embassy-funded two-year intensive English language program that brought together students of different backgrounds from underserved communities into one mixed, American-style classroom. In all participating high schools, teachers challenged students to promote peace, cooperation, and tolerance in their communities.

The embassy provided a grant to the IRC to organize a three-day training session for 35 young persons from 15 cities across the country on how to fight religious hatred, intolerance, antisemitism, and discrimination.