

CROATIA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religious thought and expression and prohibits incitement of religious hatred. All religious communities have the same religious protections under the law. The government has written agreements with the Roman Catholic Church that provide for state financial support and specific tax and other benefits; 19 other registered religious communities have agreements with the state offering benefits not available to registered religious communities without such agreements or to unregistered religious groups.

Representatives of the Jewish community and other minority groups repeatedly expressed concerns regarding the use of Ustasha (pro-Nazi regime, 1941-1945) symbols in society and criticized the government's and parliament's lack of a clear and effective legislative framework for penalizing perpetrators, particularly given the existence of different court rulings and legal positions on the public use of Ustasha symbols. Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) representatives said that although some property had been returned, restitution of property seized by the Yugoslavian government remained an outstanding issue, especially in the east of the country and along the coast. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic led a delegation to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the inmate breakout from Jasenovac concentration camp, which was also the annual commemorative event for victims of the camp. On May 12, Holy See Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin visited the country to mark the 30th anniversary of the Holy See's recognition of the country and the 25th anniversary of the ratification of three agreements between the Vatican and the government. At the official opening of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak, President Zoran Milanovic and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Türkiye said the ceremony exemplified what they said was the country's successful integration of various religious backgrounds, including Muslims.

SOC representatives expressed concern over negative comments regarding the Orthodox Church posted on private social media sites as well as in publications described as politically far right. Some members of the Catholic Church reported that protesters both objecting to and advocating COVID-19 vaccinations occasionally negatively referred to the Catholic Church in their messaging and on

their placards. Catholics also cited a rise in public criticism of the church because of its policy to support doctors' right to conscientious objection regarding abortion. Members of Jewish groups reported incidents of hate speech, especially on the internet, and of graffiti and other vandalism with offensive slogans.

On January 26, to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Chargé d'Affaires and other U.S. embassy representatives attended a guided tour and visited Zagreb's Stolperstein (stumbling blocks or memorial plaques created by German artist Gunter Demnig) for victims of the Holocaust. In April, the Chargé, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues as well as a representative from the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. held meetings with senior government officials and leaders of Jewish organizations to discuss a wide range of religious freedom issues. Embassy officials continued to encourage the government to amend legislation covering Holocaust and post Holocaust-era property restitution and urged the resolution of long-outstanding private and communal Holocaust restitution cases. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues, including freedom of expression and efforts to counter discrimination, with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and historians as well as with representatives from a broad range of religious and atheist groups. In September, the Chargé and other embassy representatives attended the opening of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak to show support for the Muslim community and to promote interreligious dialogue and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 4.2 million (midyear 2022). According to Croatian government 2021 census data released on September 22, 79 percent of the population is Catholic, 3.3 percent Serbian Orthodox, and 1.3 percent Muslim. Nearly 5 percent identify as nonreligious or atheist. According to the census, the number of self-identified Catholics declined by 7.3 percentage points from the previous census in 2011, Serbian Orthodox Christians declined by 1.08 percentage points and Muslims declined by 0.18 percentage point. The number of agnostics and skeptics increased from 0.76 percent to 1.68 percent.

Other religious groups include Jews, Protestants, and other Christians. According to the World Jewish Congress, there are approximately 1,700 Jews in the country.

Members of the Baptist, Catholic, and SOC Churches reported situations where survey respondents, particularly the elderly, were confused by the wording of the census questions. Church officials specifically said that the census included a question in which respondents could identify as Christian as well as a separate question focusing on the denomination to which they belong. All of these communities said that some respondents answered “yes” only to the first question, potentially skewing the data on specific Christian communities. Religious affiliation is often related to ethnicity. Ethnic Serbs identify as Orthodox Christians and live primarily in cities and areas bordering Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most members of other minority religious groups reside in urban areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for equality of rights regardless of religion as well as for freedom of conscience and religious expression. It prohibits incitement of religious hatred. According to the constitution, religious communities shall be equal under the law and separate from the state; they are free to conduct religious services publicly as well as open and manage schools and charitable organizations under the protection and with the assistance of the state. The penal code defines a hate crime as a criminal offense committed on the grounds of race, skin color, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The code criminalizes public incitement to violence and hate and provides sanctions for such crimes. Hate crimes are also considered an aggravating circumstance unless a provision already provides for more severe sanctions.

Hate speech is also punishable as a misdemeanor under several laws. Use of the Ustasha salute and insignia by themselves are not specifically defined as misdemeanors but could be prosecuted as such under the stricter penal code if combined with acts of violence and incitement to violence. The Constitutional Court ruled in 2016 that use of the salute was a violation of the constitution as an offense against public order and an incitement to hatred.

Legislation covering electronic media stipulates that in audio and/or audiovisual media services, it is forbidden to incite, encourage incitement, and spread hatred or discrimination on numerous grounds, including religion and political or other belief as well as antisemitism and xenophobia, fascism, nationalism, communism, and support for other totalitarian regimes. The legislation stipulates that audiovisual and radio programs and contents in electronic publications must publish accurate information and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Catholic Church receives state financial support and other benefits established by four concordats between the government and the Holy See. (Three were adopted at the same time in 1997; the fourth was adopted a year later in 1998.) One of these agreements provides for financial support for some religious officials. Another agreement stipulates funding for religious education in public schools.

The law defines the legal position of religious communities and determines eligibility for government funding and tax benefits. Registered religious communities are exempt from taxes on the purchase of real estate, the profit/capital gains tax, and taxes on donations. According to the law, a religious community previously active as a legal entity before the enactment of the existing law in 2002 (amended in 2013) need only submit its name, the location of its headquarters, information on the office of the person authorized to represent it, and the seal and stamp it uses to register. To register as a religious community, a religious group without prior legal status as a religious community must have at least 500 members and have been registered as an association, with at least three members, for at least five years. To register as a religious community, a group must also submit a list of its members and documentation outlining the group's activities and bylaws and describing its mission to the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. Unregistered religious groups may operate freely but do not receive tax benefits. They may conduct financial transactions as legal entities. A contractual agreement with the state, which grants a registered religious community eligibility for further funding and benefits, defines the community's role and activities and provides for collaboration with the government in areas of joint interest, such as education, health, and culture.

There are 55 registered religious communities, including the Catholic Church, SOC, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Christian Adventist Church, Church of Christ, Church of God, Croatian Old Catholic Church, Catholic Old Church, Evangelical Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, Pentecostal Church, Reformed Christian Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, Coordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia (an umbrella group of nine distinct Jewish communities), Jewish Community of Virovitica, Bet Israel (a Jewish group), and the Islamic Community of Croatia. In addition to the Catholic Church, 19 of the registered religious communities have formal agreements with the state that more clearly define activities and cooperation, such as in the areas of marriage and religious education in public schools. These groups may access state funds for religious activities.

According to the law, adherents are entitled to one day of leave from work for religious holidays, and the law does not require proof of affiliation for employees to exercise this right.

The state recognizes marriages conducted by registered religious communities that have concluded agreements with the state, eliminating the need for civil registration. Marriages conducted by registered communities that have not concluded agreements with the state, or by unregistered religious groups, require civil registration.

Registered religious communities that have not concluded agreements with the state and unregistered religious groups may not conduct religious education in public schools. Unregistered religious groups have no access to state funds in support of religious activities, including charitable work, counseling, and building costs. Registered religious communities that have not concluded agreements with the state and unregistered religious groups may engage in worship, proselytize, own property, and import religious literature. Only registered religious communities, with or without agreements with the state, may provide spiritual counsel in prisons, hospitals, and the military.

Public schools at both the primary and secondary levels must offer religious education, although students may opt out without providing specific grounds. The Catholic catechism is the predominant religious text used. Other religious

communities that have agreements with the state may also offer religious education classes in schools if there are seven or more students of that faith. Eligible religious communities provide the instructors, and the state pays their salaries. Private religious schools are eligible for state assistance and follow a national curriculum. Registered religious communities may have their own schools. Unregistered religious groups may not have their own schools.

Education regarding the Holocaust is mandatory in the final year of elementary school (eighth grade) and during the final year of high school.

The law allows foreign citizens whose property was confiscated during and after the Holocaust era to seek compensation or restitution if the applicant's country has a bilateral restitution treaty with the state; however, no such bilateral treaties currently exist. Two court cases have held that such treaties are not required; however, the law has not changed. The law does not allow new property claims, as the statutory deadline expired in 2003.

Appointed by parliament, the ombudsperson is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms, including religious freedom. The ombudsperson examines citizens' complaints pertaining to the work of state bodies, local and regional self-governments, and legal persons vested with public authority. The ombudsperson may issue recommendations to government agencies regarding human rights and religious freedom practices but does not have authority to enforce compliance with his or her recommendations.

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

Government Practices

The annual report of the ombudsperson released in March and covering 2021 described one case of discrimination based on religion pertaining to a rental based on religion. In an advertisement posted on Facebook, the owner offered to rent a studio apartment and invited Catholics to apply as potential tenants to apply. As a prerequisite to renting the apartment, the owner asked interested applicants to first obtain a document from the church confirming that they had undertaken the sacraments. According to police, they did not have information about the identity of the apartment owner and reported that the case could not

be investigated. The ombudsperson, however, stated the case represented discrimination based on religion. She said that while citizens have freedom of religion, the advertisement was “discriminatory in its restricted offering of goods for sale on the public market,” which was a violation of the country’s antidiscrimination laws.

On January 31, media outlets quoted Ognjen Kraus, President of the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia, as saying the country “presents itself as an antifascist state, but it has not done anything to ban the symbols and slogans of the fascist Ustasha regime.” Representatives of different minority groups unsuccessfully advocated a specific penal code amendment that would outlaw the use of the Ustasha salute, *Za Dom Spremni* (For the Homeland Ready). In April, Prime Minister Plenkovic told press the salute was already outlawed. Kraus said that, as in 2021, the government promised to meet with him about legal amendments to outlaw the use of Ustasha symbols, but the meetings did not take place. He stressed the urgent importance of such a meeting and of taking concrete steps towards a ban, since the country would take over the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) in March 2023.

SOC representatives said their community still had outstanding restitution issues with the government, mainly regarding properties and residential buildings the government appropriated during the Yugoslav period. The government reported that since 1999, the state had resolved 356 property claims related to the SOC that included the right to compensation in bonds, an increase of 12 from the previous year. Catholic Church representatives also said there remained a significant number of outstanding claims for Catholic properties appropriated during the Yugoslav period.

During the year, the government did not adopt amendments to legislation providing for the restitution of private property from the Holocaust and post-Holocaust eras for foreign claimants or reopen the deadline for potential new claims, although government officials cited progress in the resolution of some cases that were filed before 2003. In September, the government reported the resolution of 321 claims, mainly from the postwar period, worth a total of 982 million kuna (\$142.9 million), involving Jewish claimants. Of the 101 pending cases that the government monitored since 2018, 52 were resolved, some with

cash compensation of 26 million kuna (\$3.8 million) and others with returned property with an estimated worth of 78 million kuna (\$11.4 million), based on present real estate market values. Forty-nine cases remained outstanding at the end of the year.

Atheist groups continued to complain that Catholic symbols remained prevalent in government buildings such as courtrooms, prisons, and public hospitals. They said they believed this practice was inconsistent with the constitution, which states religious communities are separate from the state.

Some minority religious and secular groups, including atheists, continued to say the Catholic Church enjoyed a special status in relation to other religious communities, in part because of its concordats with the government, which provide the church with significant financial support, and in part because of its far-reaching cultural, educational, and political influence as the majority religion.

In May, media widely reported a story regarding a woman who was unable to find a doctor in the country to perform a medical emergency abortion. Catholic Church members stated that due to the widespread public debate and media coverage, the issue led to a lack of dialogue and cooperation with local government officials.

According to the Office of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, the government budgeted 342 million kuna (\$49.8 million) during the year to the Catholic Church for salaries, pensions, and other purposes, compared with 325.9 million kuna (\$47.4 million) in 2021. The government provided funding to other religious communities that had concluded agreements with the state, a portion of which was based on their size, in addition to funds provided to support religious education in public schools and the operation of private religious schools. The government budgeted 24.9 million kuna (\$3.6 million) to these groups, compared with 23.9 million kuna (\$3.5 million) in 2021. Atheist groups again criticized the government for allocating more to the Catholic Church than to other groups. Although the funding was generally proportional to the Catholic share of the population, representatives from atheist groups stated the criticism reflected their general concern about what they perceive as the outsized role of the church in society.

Muslim community representatives said the government worked with all religious communities to temporarily reduce a pre-Croatian-independence tariff on utilities for religious community buildings by reclassifying them as “households” rather than “industry” offices.

The March ombudsperson’s annual report stated that during 2021, a request for the formal withdrawal of official registration with the Catholic Church was positively resolved. Several citizens in past years had contacted the ombudsperson’s office to report difficulties in the procedure to withdraw from the official Catholic registry.

On January 27, parliament started its session with a minute of silence to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, while a delegation led by then Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Social Issues and Human Rights Boris Milosevic and Minister for Culture and Media Nina Obuljen Korzinek laid wreaths at Zagreb’s Mirogoj cemetery. Local press quoted Speaker of the Parliament Gordan Jandrokovic as saying, “The Holocaust is an eternal warning of the evils that can rise from xenophobia and racism.” President Milanovic remarked, “Today we remember with great respect the unprecedented suffering of the Jewish people. We sincerely mourn the millions of people killed. We all need to continue to respect and commemorate their sacrifice. Our obligation, especially towards future generations, is to send a message of peace, understanding and friendship among nations.”

Prime Minister Plenkovic led a delegation on April 22 to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the inmate breakout from Jasenovac concentration camp, which was also the annual commemorative event for victims of the camp. Then Deputy Prime Minister Milosevic, representing the Serb minority, accompanied Plenkovic, along with several other government ministers. President Milanovic attended separately and laid a wreath at the site. Representatives of the Jewish community chose to attend the commemoration separately from the government to protest the government’s failure to change the criminal code to outlaw the Ustasha insignia, including the salute and slogan Za Dom Spremnii.

On April 28, Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah), Prime Minister Plenkovic posted on Twitter, “On the occasion of Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day we show our respect for the victims of the Holocaust and the

Ustasha regime. We are not forgetting; we must not forget. By promoting a culture of remembrance, we are building a future in which tolerance and respect will be the foundation of peace.” On the same date, the head of the Jewish Community of Zagreb and President of the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Communities Kraus attended a commemoration at Jasenovac concentration camp, where he stressed that the camp was the largest of the Ustasha’s more than 50 death camps.

Ombudsperson Tena Simonovic Einwaller participated in a global online event on April 27-28 marking the founding of the Combat Antisemitism Movement and the Zikaron BaSalon global Holocaust remembrance initiative. According to the ombudsperson, the event served as a conversation with the last generation of Holocaust survivors, bringing them into “living rooms” around the world, while also featuring virtual messages from decision makers and opinion shapers. The ombudsperson highlighted the country’s forthcoming March 2023 IHRA presidency and stressed the importance of education on the Holocaust, including the suffering it caused, the dangers of the propaganda, and the hate speech that preceded it. She also emphasized the importance of events that provide an opportunity to record the testimonies of the last generation of Holocaust survivors as a “crucial element in the education of the generations to come,” particularly in a time “rife with hate speech, fake news, and Holocaust denial.”

On April 27, Zagreb Mayor Tomislav Tomasevic and Auschwitz survivor Oleg Mandic unveiled a memorial for the victims of the Holocaust and the Ustasha regime. President Milanovic, Minister of Culture and Media Korzinek, representatives of Jewish communities, religious leaders, former presidents, and antifascist groups attended the opening. The 39-foot-high metal sculpture next to Zagreb's main railway station represents a wall of suitcases the Ustasha regime seized from victims before the regime packed them into cattle cars and deported them to concentration camps. The monument inscription states that the sculpture stands where approximately 800 Zagreb Jews were transported to Auschwitz in August 1942. The project’s unveiling was delayed for several years following protests from the Jewish Community of Zagreb that the monument inscription referred only to Jewish victims of the Holocaust and did not specifically note the Ustasha regime’s role in their deportation to concentration camps. The updated plaque listed victims of the Holocaust and included reference to the

Ustasha regime. President Milanovic told reporters he was pleased with the unveiling of the memorial and commented that the inscription was appropriate.

On May 1, the head of the Muslim community, Grand Mufti Aziz Hasanovic, hosted an iftar that President Milanovic, Minister of Culture and Media Korzinek, Zagreb Mayor Tomasevic, members of parliament, Zagreb city officials, and former presidents attended. At the iftar, President Milanovic stated the Croatian model of protection of the rights of ethnic minorities and religious communities was good and civilized, but that there was still a lot of work to do to combat existing prejudices. He remarked that his office “was always open to the Muslim community to talk as often as possible and exchange views.” Zagreb Mayor Tomasevic said that the only way to face challenging times was “cooperation between citizens, nations and religions, [and] cooperation among all people to achieve the universal values of peace, love, respect and tolerance.”

On May 12, Holy See Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin visited the country to mark the 30th anniversary of the Holy See’s recognition of it and the 25th anniversary of the ratification of three of the four agreements between the Vatican and the country. In comments made to parliament, Cardinal Parolin said, “The Vatican’s recognition of Croatia will be remembered as an act of strong and resolute support for the legality and legitimacy of the Croatian state before the international community.” Speaker of Parliament Gordan Jandrokovic stated, “Croatian history was inconceivable without the role of the Catholic Church and Christianity,” which, he added, “were deeply woven into the Croatian people’s being.” He added that through the centuries, “The Church and faith have been the guardians not just of the religious, but also the national and cultural identity of Croats.”

On July 9, Speaker of Parliament Jandrokovic extended Eid al-Adha greetings to the head of the Muslim community, Grand Mufti Hasanovic, and all Muslims. He said, “This holiday reminds us that it is important to raise awareness in society about mutual understanding and respect, tolerance and community solidarity, and charity towards those in need.”

On September 8, President Milanovic and Turkish President Erdogan attended the official opening ceremony of the Islamic Cultural Center in the town of Sisak. President Milanovic remarked that “in the old Croatian city of Sisak, where many

centuries ago the swords of Christianity and Islam crossed, is where today peace and friendship reign.” He said the country was opening a monument to “culture, modernity, the Muslim community, and a modern Croatia, a democratic country open to all people of good will, of all faiths.” President Erdogan said, “Croatia is an example of a European Union country that respects the freedom, prosperity, and rights of Muslims.” He said the new center in Sisak was a symbol “of Croatia’s model status and multiculturalism.” The Croatian and Turkish governments jointly funded the center with \$1.9 million and \$6.8 million, respectively.

During the year, the ombudsperson reported a complaint from an employee whose supervisor denied him a day off for an Islamic holiday in 2021. The complainant stated his supervisor requested written confirmation from his religious community as proof of his religious affiliation before approving the leave request. The ombudsperson stated that according to the law, adherents are entitled to one day of leave from their work for religious holidays, and the law does not require any form of proof of affiliation for employees to exercise this right. As such, the ombudsperson concluded that the employer had no legal basis for requesting such documentation.

In September, the government appointed Sara Lustig as Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Holocaust Issues and Combating Antisemitism. Lustig also serves as Deputy Head of the Croatian delegation to the IHRA, which was preparing for the country’s presidency of the alliance in 2023.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

SOC representatives expressed concern over negative sentiment and messaging towards the Orthodox Church by media sources, including on television, as well in private comments on social media platforms.

During a May 1 iftar reception, Mufti Hasanovic remarked that the “high standards of the position of religious communities, including the Islamic community in Croatia, are a step forward in civilization that can serve as an export product in branding and strengthening the international reputation and position of Croatia.” He said that about 25,000 Muslims served during the Homeland War (War of Independence, 1991-1995) and that 1,187 of them, mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, had since been integrated into modern Croatia.

Some members of the Catholic Church reported that protesters both objecting to and advocating COVID-19 vaccinations occasionally negatively referred to the Catholic Church in their messaging and on their placards. They reported that provaccination protesters lessened their use of negative messaging after the Catholic Church made a public statement that clarified that it did not oppose vaccination but supported individuals' right to choose whether to get vaccinated. Catholics also cited a rise in public criticism of the church regarding its support of doctors' right to conscientious objection regarding abortion. Members of the Catholic Church cited good cooperation with other religious groups.

Members of Jewish groups reported incidents of hate speech, especially on the internet, as well as of graffiti and other vandalism containing offensive slogans. On January 24, antisemitic flyers appeared in two neighborhoods in Zagreb blaming Jews for the COVID-19 pandemic. The flyers listed the names of the U.S. public health and pharmaceutical company officials, stating they were all Jewish. City officials strongly condemned the incident and police promptly removed the flyers. On July 18, police investigated an act of vandalism in which perpetrators painted a large swastika outside of a hotel in Trilj, where approximately 60 children from a French Jewish community were staying. Authorities promptly removed the swastika.

In September, Dinamo Zagreb football fans reportedly marched through the streets of Milan displaying the Nazi salute ahead of their team's match against Milan. In response, the European Jewish Congress stated, "Absolutely abhorrent ... The world of football must free itself from fascists and carriers of hatred, a hatred that from soccer fields spreads to the squares." According to a media report in December, a crew filmed national soccer team players Dejan Lovren and Marcelo Brozovic singing "For the Homeland Ready" after returning from their participation in the World Cup.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In April, the Chargé, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues as well as a representative of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. held meetings with the Minister of Justice and Administration, Minister of Culture and Media, representatives from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and leaders of

Jewish organizations to discuss restitution of private and communal properties and art from the Holocaust and post Holocaust-era and Holocaust education and remembrance. In their engagements, U.S. officials continued to encourage the government to adopt amendments to legislation to provide for the restitution of private property, including provisions that would unequivocally allow for foreign claims, and to reopen the deadline for potential new claims.

During the year, embassy officials attended major events that emphasized the importance of Holocaust remembrance and interreligious dialogue. On January 26, prior to Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Chargé and other embassy officials attended a guided tour of the Stolperstein (stumbling blocks) in Zagreb. During the tour, embassy officials discussed the importance of religious tolerance and freedom with a representative from the NGO Croatian Center for Promotion of Tolerance and Preservation of Holocaust Remembrance.

In October, the embassy partnered with the Jewish Film Festival of Zagreb, the Center for the Promotion of Tolerance and Holocaust Remembrance, and the Jasenovac Memorial Center to commemorate the Holocaust through two youth performances of the opera *Brundibar* for more than 400 students, at the Jasenovac concentration camp site and in Zagreb. A U.S. citizen Holocaust survivor who had performed in *Brundibar* while incarcerated in the Jewish ghetto and concentration camp at Terezin, delivered video testimony about his experiences to the audience. An advisor from the Office of the President and officials from the Ministries of Culture and Education also attended the event. On May 1, embassy officials attended a reception hosted by Mufti Hasanovic and spoke with other attendees about the importance of religious tolerance and diversity.

In September, the Chargé and other embassy representatives attended the opening of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak to show support for the Muslim community, as well as broader U.S. support for interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance.

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues, including freedom of expression and efforts to counter discrimination, with NGOs such as Human Rights House and Protagora, academics, and historians as well as with representatives from Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, Baptist, Jewish, Muslim, other

religious, and atheist groups. The embassy continued to provide grants to local NGOs and cultural institutions for the advancement of education on Holocaust issues, with the goal of creating a regional network of teachers to address the topic through conferences, commemorations, and cultural events. The embassy used social media platforms to highlight a range of religious freedom issues, including support for Holocaust commemorations and a pluralistic view of faith and religion, particularly among youth in the country. The embassy provided funding for the Croatian Education and Development Network for the Evolution of Communication, which put together a training seminar and series of educational materials on the Holocaust.

In April, the embassy inaugurated its new media production studio, named it after Croatian-American Branko Lustig, producer of the film *Schindler's List* and a Holocaust survivor, for his work in promoting education about the Holocaust. The embassy hosted a media event to announce the studio and advance U.S. government priorities regarding Holocaust awareness and remembrance. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues attended the event. Special Advisor Lustig also attended the event and emphasized the legacy of her father was to “forgive, but not forget.”