

# IIRF Reports

International Institute for Religious Freedom  
Internationales Institut für Religionsfreiheit  
Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse



Draško Djenović with  
contributions by Dr. Branko Bjelajac

## **Serbia: Report on Religious Freedom Issues**

*November 2008 – December 2011*

Bonn – Cape Town – Colombo

**A monthly journal with special reports,  
research projects, reprints and documentation**

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Draško Djenović with  
contributions by Dr. Branko Bjelajac

## Serbia: Report on Religious Freedom Issues

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Center 9 ([www.centar9.info](http://www.centar9.info)) is a web based initiative striving to provide original reporting and analysis on violations of the freedom of thought, conscience and belief of all people, whatever their religious affiliation, in an objective, truthful and timely manner. It mainly publishes on the Republic of Serbia and ex-Yugoslav states, and also on the neighboring countries, such as Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia. Center 9 is a Serbian NGO registered at Serbian Business Register Agency in Belgrade at Association Register under no. BU 7509/2011 since 12.04.2011. It is a branch of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. The members of the Board of Center 9 are: Dr. Branko Bjelajac, Draško Djenović and Dr. Zdravko Šordjan.



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This report relates to a period of three years – from November 2008 until December 2011. In it, Center 9 explores a fact that a number of reported physical attacks on churches and religious communities within a given period have declined, when compared to previous periods. Most attacks were held against Jehovah's Witnesses (JW), Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Center 9 found that there were no reported attacks on Catholic Church buildings, but rather against Catholic graveyards. Center 9 has also discovered that in this period no physical attacks were attempted against the church building and the believers of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Malajnica, in the region of Eastern Serbia. However, there was an increase in the number of attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Serbia but in most cases; these instances were not publicized as SOC does not offer such information to the public.

When asked for the possible reason of the decline of the violent attacks, Dr. Zdravko Šordjan, general secretary of the Belgrade-based Centre for Tolerance and Inter-religious Relations, told Center 9 on 23 March 2011: "The decline of the attacks on small religious communities is a part of an improving climate in Serbia. 'Hunting the sects' is not 'in' anymore. Serbia understands that if we want to join the EU, we need to grant more human rights."

Another reason for the decline can be found in the fact that courts recently started to prosecute attackers, which had not often been the case in the past. Damir Porobić of JW told Center 9 on 25 January 2010 that a hearing was held for the attacks on JW missionaries in Stari Banovci (two foreign JW missionaries had been held as hostages and a JW of foreign citizenship had been attacked in a barber shop): "The case finally came to the court. The accused Miroslav Savić from Stari Banovci was punished to 10 months of prison." This is probably one of the highest prison sentences for religious-related attacks in recent Serbian history, Center 9 has found.

Dr. Dragan Novaković, at that time Serbian Deputy Minister of Religion, told Center 9 on 24 March 2010: "As a representative of the Ministry of Religion I must say that I am glad that a decline in religious-based attacks is evident. However, I am still not satisfied and I will be only when all the attacks stop. We should say that this improvement is a result of the new Serbian Constitution and the law passed in 2006 regarding churches and religious communities that grants religious freedom. The law explicitly proclaims religious freedom of churches and religious communi-

ties; although there is no doubt that some people and religious communities question some of the articles of this law."

"The Minister and others in the Ministry are dedicated to the promotion of religious freedom and tolerance. Unfortunately, churches and religious communities do not always inform us about the attacks. When we are informed we visit and publicly support them to disapprove the attacks. We also advise churches and religious communities to inform the local police about the attacks, but also to inform the Ministry of Religion, since the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not forward such information to us."

## Acts of Discrimination

Although there has generally been a decline of physical attacks, this has not been the case all the time and for certain religious communities. Miodrag Živanović, then the president of the East European Union of the SDA Church, sent a letter to Council of Europe and OSCE in November 2008 requesting protection for the SDA Church in Serbia. "We send an appeal to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe on behalf of all the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who live in Serbia, with a kind request to counsel and help us in the protection of our freedom and right for living. Up until now, we have tried many times to apply to responsible authorities and to our government seeking help in stopping all forms of violence against our Church, our properties and our church members. Since our petitions and appeals have had no success, and seeing no effort in preventing this violence and sanctioning persons who have committed it, we see no other means than to request support from the international community. The latest events in the past month in Kragujevac, Sivic, Leskovac, Jagodina and Belgrade, reveal that such things happen in our country freely, without any responsibility and punishment. This is the reason for our appeal for the protection of our church members, their safety and their children."

On 18 December 2008, the mayor of the Žitoradja municipality decided that all firstborn children will receive a gift of 20,000 Serbian Dinars (235 EUR at that time), but one of the conditions was that the child would have to be baptized in a Christian church. This decision was later changed under public pressure.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2009, Belgrade police inspector, Zoran Luković, who is also a member of the International Organization against Sects, published a series of harsh statements about Jehovah's Witnesses in



several daily newspapers. The basis for that was public criticism of a mother, whose child had been given to foster parents who were both JW, in the vicinity of Belgrade. At the end of March 2009, a criminal charge against this police officer was filed on the grounds of slander. In a few other instances, during 2009 and 2010, the Serbian press quoted from Luković's books on sects or interviewed him: in September 2009 in "Pančevački pres," in January 2010 in "Kurir", in "Vesti" published in Germany in Serbian in mid-February, etc. In March 2010, internet portal "Vesti" published a serial on sects, based on Zoran Luković's statements. "Kurir" – the Belgrade-based daily newspaper claimed in a 24 January 2010 article that there are 200,000 people in various sects, which is an old erroneous statement by Luković which is nonetheless often reprinted. Luković's derogatory statements on sects and religious communities, regarding both the registered ones and those who are not, but have other type of legal status (e.g. NGO's), are published at the web site of the Ministry of Interior Affairs: [www.mup.gov.rs/domino/saveti.nsf/pl1?OpenPage](http://www.mup.gov.rs/domino/saveti.nsf/pl1?OpenPage).

Eight years after the Belgrade Bajrakli mosque (the only one in the central part of Serbian capital, also spelled Bayrakli) was damaged in a fire attack by a mob during the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2004, when a local Islamic library was also burned down with more than 7,000 books, the legal process is still at the beginning. There is a charge against 20 people, and process was restarted during April 2010 but was not finished until this report's publication. During the same night in 2004, a mosque in Niš was burned and the perpetrators were sentenced in 2006, with minimal sentences for such a charge. Belgrade mufti Muhamed Jusufspahić told Center 9 that Miloš Radisavljević Kimi, a person formally accused for arson of the mosque, is not guilty for burning Belgrade Bajrakli mosque on the 17 March 2004. He pointed out that Radisavljević and his father are his good standing acquaintances and neighbors for a long time. He stated that he is sorry that there is a court case against Radisavljević.

Former President of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Serbia, Aleksandar Nećak, has appealed several times to the public and to the Serbian president Boris Tadić to prevent the printing and promotion of anti-Semitic books in Serbia. During 2008 and 2009 the Jewish community submitted more than 30 criminal charges against persons and organizations for inciting anti-Semitism, with some being rejected by various courts, while others were not even taken into the proceedings of a formal persecution. In February 2009 the Federation wrote to the Serbian justice min-

ister, Snežana Malović, alerting her on the inactivity of the justice system in their cases. In January 2010 President Tadić responded to the Serbian Jews that he will do everything is in his power to prevent the further spreading of anti-Semitism in Serbia. During a live reality show in February 2011 on TV Pink, two participants gave anti-Semitic and hate statements – which caused a wider reaction of the state officials, even of Israel's ambassador to Serbia.

In September 2009, several school principals in the Tutin municipality were reported with several cases of obstruction, since they did not recognize appointments of religious teachers from the Mashikhat of the Islamic Community in Serbia. Prior to that new praxis, teachers were appointed by officials of the Ministry of Religion. Due to this, a number of religious teachers lost their jobs, although they were involved in religious education since 2001.

In November 2009, the Ministry of Religion offered scholarships to students of religious educational institutions in the country, but not to students of the Faculty of Islamic studies from Novi Pazar. In January 2010, this was changed so that these students could apply for scholarships as well. Center 9 has found that the Serbian Ministry of Religion and Diaspora in their contest for the award of scholarships to students of religious high schools in October 2011, requested that they apply to the „Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, the Orthodox Theological Faculty of St. Basil University of East Sarajevo, the Serbian Orthodox Church College of Arts and Conservation, to the Theological-Catechetical Institute in Subotica, to the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Belgrade and Faculty of Islamic Studies in Novi Pazar. For the students belonging to the Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Jewish community in Serbia and other registered religious communities „according to the same competition.“ It appears that Adventists (SDA) or evangelical theological students cannot get state scholarship for their studies.

Furthermore, in November 2009, the Serbian state news agency, Tanjug, quoted the Ministry of Religion statement that they had stopped giving financial aid to "Glas Islama" (*The Voice of Islam*), the only regular publication of the Islamic community in Serbia. The reason stated was that "unfair publishing" of information about the Republic of Serbia and their institutions (actually about Bogoljub Šijaković, then the Minister or Religion), had been conducted.

Mashikhat of the Islamic Community in Serbia publicly complained that Islamic children need to learn to sing hymns to Serbian St. Sava and to do drawings of his image at public schools. St. Sava, celebrated every 27<sup>th</sup> of January by the Serbian Orthodox Church, is proclaimed to be the “protector of the Serbian school systems and students.” Tensions were high between these two religions, particularly in January 2010, after the newly elected Serbian Patriarch, Irinej, had given an improper statement about Islam, for which he later excused himself.

On 25 January 2010, the Serbian minister of Interior Affairs and First Deputy Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, stated at the conference on “Internal Security of Serbia,” that police will make every effort to prevent destructive activities of religious sects, especially activities related to young people. He also said that there should be more awareness-building in society about this problem. Dačić emphasized that religious sects and cults are present in Serbia and that their activities are negatively influencing security and stability of the country. He shared that sects have various target groups depending on their determination – targeting children, young, elderly and lonely people, and in some cases students, intellectuals and women.

Even after being reminded for several years in a row (since 2009) by the ombudsman of the Vojvodina province, the provincial Secretariat for Education, Administration and National Communities continues to provide financial support only to ‘traditional churches and religious communities’ in the years of 2010 and 2011, while declining to give support to confessional communities.

## Registration Issues

The 2006 Religious law and the Bylaws on the Registry and other documents, mention that the Republic Serbia has seven traditional churches and religious communities. However, the website of the Serbian Ministry of Religion speaks about eight of them. The eighth one is the Eparchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, ‘Dakia Felix’, with its headquarters in Deta, Romania, and its administrative center in Vršac, Serbia.

Besides eight traditional churches and religious communities, 17 additional so-called non-traditional churches have been officially registered: Seventh Day Adventist Church, United Methodist Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Evangelical Church, Church of Christ’ Love, Christ Spiritual Church, Union of the Christian Baptist churches in Serbia (the smaller of the two Serbian Baptist Unions),

the Apostolic Christian Church of Nazarenes, Church of God, Protestant Christian Fellowship, Brethren Church, Free Church, Jehovah Witnesses, Covenant church “Sion”, Reform Movement of the SDA Church, and Protestant Evangelical Church “Spiritual Light” and Christ’s Evangelical Church.

Damir Porobić of the JW told Center 9 that “in November 2009, we received two decisions of the Serbian Supreme Court declining the previous rejections of registration by the Ministry of Religion.” On 8 February 2010, JW in Serbia were registered.

Djordje Bosanac, of the Union of the Reform Movement of the SDA Church, confirmed to Center 9 that they received registration in February 2010, after the Serbian Supreme Court had canceled an earlier rejection by the Ministry of Religion for a registration.

In October 2009, the Belgrade Church of Christ learned that their bank account had been blocked since the bank was not able to confirm that the church was registered. Newly adopted financial laws require that banks must check their customers (in this case a religious community) through the state system to see if they are registered. Since October 2009, the Serbian Business Registry Agency keeps registers for businesses and NGOs, but not for churches and religious communities. When the bank announced that the Belgrade Church of Christ was not registered according to the new religious law, the account was blocked. Upon this, the church wrote a letter to the Ministry of Religion with copies of old registration documents and the ministry gave them a letter stating that they could continue with the “old registration”. “We understand”, a church representative told Center 9, “that this letter is not a registration, but it is enough to keep our bank account in order to be able to pay our church bills.” In previous years, the Hare Krishna community had encountered the same problem, while the Reform movement of the SDA Church found their telephone number to be disconnected at the church in Novi Sad, since they had not been able to pay their bills. Center 9 also received information that some other small Protestant communities acquired a similar letter from the ministry which helped them in such situations.

However, a problem with bank accounts is not related only to small Protestant communities. According to Mirko Štefković, ACN News on 21 March 2012, Roman Catholic parishes in Serbia cannot hold bank accounts as well. Mirko Štefković is the Secretary of a Bishop János Pénzes of Subotica.

Bojan Aleksandrović, protopresbyter of the ROC in Malajnica, told Center 9 on 21 March 2010: “On the

basis of the Registration of the Eparchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 'Dakia Felix', with headquarters in Deta, Romania, and administrative center in Vršac, Serbia, the Office of Statistics in Serbia gave us the statistic number for Protopresbyteriat in Malajnica, in the Timok region of Serbia, and for a few new parishes, earlier the same year. After that, the Ministry of Religion lodged a complaint to the Office of Statistics as ROC is registered only for the Banat region."

Damir Porobić of JW on 26 April 2011 commented for Center 9 about the positive development in the instance of civilian service and the military. "The civilian service (as an alternative to military service) in Serbia was under the oversight of the Ministry of Defense. Even though this service was served in civic institutions such as hospitals, some Witnesses conscientiously objected to performing civilian service under the direction of the military. However, none of JW's had been imprisoned for refusing to perform civilian service, although a number of them received a suspended sentence or were sentenced to pay a fine."

On 3 April 2010, the Serbian parliament passed a law proclaiming amnesty for those accused of criminal action against the Serbian Army during the period of June 2006 to April 2010. This law also applied to those of Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to perform civilian service under the oversight of the Ministry of Defense. The law annuls all judgments, cancels all legal proceedings or the execution of any criminal sanctions against the individual, and deletes all sentences from the person's record.

In September 2010, the Serbian government decided to abolish the required military and civilian service and forwarded this recommendation to the Serbian Parliament for adoption. As of 1 January 2011, there is no compulsory military and civilian service in Serbia.

Jehovah's Witnesses are enrolled in the Registry of Churches and Religious Communities in Serbia as of February 2010. As a result of that enrollment, the Customs administration based on the request of JW should return funds already paid for import and tax fees for literature and other materials donated for religious use. Since the decision is retroactive, fees for the last three years should be returned. However, the funds have not reached the JW community yet.

## Restitution of Property

Although it is evident that during the 2011 there were less physical attacks on churches and religious communities, when considering the church-state relations, the overall situation is not so bright.

The Serbian Parliament adopted a general law on restitution in September 2011, which created more problems than solutions for religious entities. The initial law on the returning of the property to the churches and religious communities was adopted in 2006. However, only three months after taking a post of the finance minister, in August 2008, Ms. Diana Dragutinović sent a memo (No. 021-01-42/2008-08) to Mr. Vladimir Todorović, the then director of the restitution agency with the following content:

"In the near future there will be a proposal of a law on denationalization, in which will be suggested, in a public interest, a decrease of the amount of financial compensation to the former owners of the nationalized property, and a compensation in property will change its nature from a returning the same objects (restitution) to a compensation. This will lead to unavoidable changes in the adopted law on the returning of the property to the churches and religious communities. Therefore, as a ministry responsible for the acts related to denationalization, we are indicating that for now there should not be any decisions related to financially compensate, or otherwise return property to the churches and religious organizations – as these decisions will be in a disaccord with the aforementioned principles of a new law ..."

At a press conference held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2011 in the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia (FJS), the then FJS president Alexander Nećak stated that: "Contrary to the Constitution, laws, human and minority rights laws, the Serbian government is offering to the Jews either to fight with them, or to donate its buildings, archive, enormous collection of the items of the Jewish historical museum to the World Jewish community."

Similar statements related to their property restitution to churches were voiced by a Serbian Orthodox Bishop Irinej, and the Roman-Catholic Belgrade Archbishop Hočevar.

At a conference it was heard that since 2010, when a former director's mandate ended, a new person was not appointed (this occurred only in 2012).

This situation united all traditional churches and religious communities around their requests. Nećak stated: "We finally managed to join together on this



issue and will address this as a block.” He also stated that until the October 2011, the FJS got 4% of its property back. Jewish community sent 520 requests for restitution in which asked for a return of 199 hectares of land, 63 business and 205 housing buildings and 59 graveyards.

The FJS got in a dispute with the Serbian government as they are asking for their property taken since 1941 to be returned, while the government representatives would like to count on 1945 onwards (most of the Jewish property was sequestered during the war, until 1945). The FJS asks for a small portion of a property value that once belonged to perished Jews – and that for making a fund from which the FJS and its activities in Serbia could be financed. That property is valued at 550 million Eur (720 million US \$).

*“We have a museum for which the state is not giving any support, and one kilometer of archival materials with rather valuable documents. If we cannot maintain it, we need to return it to the Jewish communities in the former Yugoslav republics. We also publish a good number of books and scientific publications, we have language classes, religious education, religious services. We finance our kindergartens, literary contest that is oldest in the country... Should we shut all down and leave the premises since we cannot afford to pay electricity, water and other energy expenses?”*

Belgrade rabbi Isak Asiel reported to Center 9 that if the religion ministry would cease to support his community (heating bills) he would have to close it down.

The Islamic Faith Community in Serbia did not receive anything from their restitution requests filled until now.

The Seventh Day Adventist church (SDA), that does not have a status of a traditional religious community but is registered with the government, received back a building in which is their central church and the seat for their South East European union. This building was always used by the SDA, although in the past it was a property of the Republic of Serbia. Now, when the building is formally returned to the SDA, the state asks for the transfer of property tax to be paid, as if the SDA purchased a building.

## Legal Cases

**JW vs. Orthodox priest Jagodina**, 17 January 2008 – On separate occasions, an orthodox priest verbally and physically attacked (by slapping and kicking) five members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses community who

were engaged in the public ministry in the Jagodina municipality. Although a suit was brought forth, the criminal case was lost with regard to §317 of the Criminal Code (Instigating national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance), while the case about the physical harm was redirected to another court. An appeal was filed in May 2010. The complaint was updated at the end of October 2010 with references to specific regulations from the European Convention for Human Rights.

This case was then continued at the Higher Court in Jagodina for instigation of other acts – preventing performance of religious rites, bullying and threats to security. A sentence was delivered on 21 April 2011: two months imprisonment, suspended to two years’ probation.

In May 2011, the Court of Appeals dismissed the appeal and upheld the acquittal of the priest. A constitutional appeal was filed with the Constitutional Court of Serbia in July 2011.

**JW vs. Orthodox priest Kragujevac** – there is a separate action against an Orthodox priest for the crimes of: violation of the freedom of religion and performing religious service, ill-treatment and torture, endangerment of safety and violent behavior. The lower court sentenced him for the first of these criminal acts.

He then went on to appeal the verdict. An appeal was considered by the Court of Appeals in August 2011. Priest was freed and the rest of accusation was rejected. The appeal to Court of Appeal in Kragujevac was given.

**JW vs. Newspaper Belgrade**, – in September 2010, in a Belgrade daily newspaper, an article was published about a notorious murder of a thirteen year old child. The article had a title that alluded to a possible connection to the boy’s disappearance with Jehovah’s Witnesses. In December 2010, a lawsuit was filed with the Court of First Instance for defamation. Since filing this report, the court has been silent.

**JW vs. perpetrators Bajina Bašta**, 20 and 21 March 2008 (during the nights) – unknown assailants attacked the building where the JW meet in Bajina Bašta municipality with stones, breaking windows and damaging a car of a Witness living in the same house. Police arrived but failed to investigate the identity of the offenders.

The next day, on 22 March 2008, a large mob gathered and threw stones at the building, inflicting considerable damage. Police fraternized with the mob. The offenders threatened the lives of the Witnesses, yelled

religious insults, and physically attacked several Witnesses, even hurling stones at women and children. The building was vandalized on the inside and out, religious literature and the car of the home owner were destroyed. Subsequent attempts to repair the home were again met with mob action. JW filed criminal charges against the perpetrators and filed a complaint to initiate investigation of the police behavior. In October 2010, after a long and extensive court examination, the local court rejected the criminal complaint stating lack of evidence.

**JW vs. attacker Klenek** – Concerning attack on two elderly JW women on 2 April 2008 in Klenak [see: <http://www.centar9.info/archive/article/pdf/17/en-EN/SERBIA:-VIOLENT-ATTACKS-CONTINUING,-BUT-MAINLY-DECLINING>] the person was identified and criminal charges were filed. After some time, the first hearing was held in October 2010. Court proceedings continued until August 2011 with the goal to be finalized by November 2011. Finally decision was made in March 2012. The person was partly freed and partly sentenced. The appeal to Court of Appeal will be given.

**JW vs. a local official Bor** – There is a court case concerning an interview of a local community official at a local TV station in Bor when he accused Jehovah's Witnesses of committing some heinous crimes [<http://www.centar9.info/archive/article/pdf/17/en-EN/SERBIA:-VIOLENT-ATTACKS-CONTINUING,-BUT-MAINLY-DECLINING>] This was followed by a court action for defamation. In October 2010, the trial court issued a verdict of acquittal for the defendant. Dissatisfied with the decision, Jehovah's Witnesses sent an appeal to the appellate court. The Court of Appeals overturned the previous decision and ordered a retrial. Retrial began in October 2011. In February 2012 person was freed from charges. The appeal to the Court of Appeals in Belgrade will be given.

**JW versus neuropsychiatry doctor Belgrade** – A professor of neuropsychiatry and a member of the European Association for the monitoring of sects and their activities in a newspaper article published during the District convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in July 2008 made false accusations concerning JW. This was followed by a legal action for libel. The Court of First Instance dismissed the case without opening the proceedings. An appeal was sent to the appellate court. In April 2011 the Court of Appeals upheld the first instance verdict dismissing the complaint. In June 2011 a constitutional complaint was filed with the Constitutional Court in Belgrade. The Constitutional Court upheld the acquittal on the grounds that

only the defendant may file complaint for violation of constitutional rights to a fair trial, not a prosecutor or public prosecutor.

**Milanović vs. Serbia**, 14 December 2010 – The Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) announced that the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Života Milanović vs. the Republic of Serbia, pursuant to the petition submitted by YIHR on 2 October 2007, made a ruling according to which state bodies of the Republic of Serbia had violated Article 3 and Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Života Milanović from Jagodina, a member of the Hindu Vaishnava religious community (Hare Krishna), was physically attacked five times between 2001 and 2007 because of his religious beliefs. The assailants beat him with arms and legs, baseball bats, stabbed a knife into his arms, legs, stomach and chest. In June 2006, Života had a cross engraved onto his head with a knife. YIHR filed three criminal complaints to the District Attorney's Office in Jagodina, the first one in March 2006 and the last one in June 2007, contacted the President of Serbia, the ministries of Justice and Interior Affairs, and the General Inspectorate, but the attacks persisted.

As stated in the ruling, the state of Serbia is responsible for the violation of Article 3 of the Convention, according to which no one shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and in relation to that of Article 14, according to which "the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

The Republic of Serbia can file a motion that the case be presented before the Grand Chamber of the Court in Strasbourg.

**Jabuka racial and religious attacks** – A verdict for racial and religious intolerance in Jabuka near Pančevo in June 2010 can serve as a proof of the unwillingness of courts in Serbia to adequately punish the perpetrators of such extremely serious offenses. This is considered by the NGOs Women in Black, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights YUKOM and the Regional Center for Minorities. They protested because those who behaved violently were sentenced to five months' probation or correctional measures.

As we can see from a number of quoted examples, court cases in Serbia are rather inefficient. It seems

as if a good will doesn't exist to sanction perpetrators of religious intolerance according to the laws already existing.

## A List of Attacks on Religious Communities

### 2008

1 November – windows were broken at the SDA Church in Kragujevac.

11 November – unknown persons wrote graffiti on the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS (Mormons) in Belgrade. Police took photographs of the graffiti.

10-14 November – during this period someone repeatedly broke windows at the SDA Church in Leskovac.

16 November – several cars were damaged at the fenced and locked parking of the SDA headquarters in Belgrade. Ministry of Religion expressed regret.

16/17 December (during the night) – unknown persons wrote graffiti of the word “Sect” on the wall and the fence of the JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica. The police took photographs of the graffiti.

Late December – Evangelical Church in Kragujevac was damaged by thrown stones. Two windows and the church name panel were targeted.

### 2009

8 January – members of the “Obraz” (nationalist youth organization in Serbia) tried to stop a delivery of Samaritan Purse packages at a Pentecostal church in Belgrade. A strong gendarmerie force protected the church building and its attendees.

25 January – Greek Catholic Church in Novi Sad was broken into. The thieves stole about 20,000 Serbian Dinars (200 EUR) and a pulpit Bible.

7 March – one window was broken and color splash thrown at the façade of the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS (Mormons) in Novi Sad. The police came and took photographs.

28/29 March (during the night) – nationalist graffiti was written at the gate of the Catholic graveyard in Novi Sad, TV Vojvodina reported.

14/15 April (during the night) – unknown perpetrators broke into the Parish office of the Slovak Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Stara Pazova. The church deposit box weighing 200 kg was stolen – but with only little money inside.

18 April (during the night) – unknown persons wrote graffiti on the wall of the JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica. The police took photographs of the graffiti.

30 April (during the night) – unknown persons damaged the JW Kingdom Hall in Belgrade with stones. The police came to the scene and promised that they will be more vigilant in the vicinity of their building.

9 May (during the night) – unknown persons wrote graffiti with national symbols, and a slogan “Go out from Serbia – Serbia to Serbs” on the wall of the JW Kingdom Hall in Loznica. The police took photographs of the graffiti.

9 May – eggs were thrown at the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS (Mormons) building in Novi Sad. The police came to the scene and took photographs.

16 May (during the night) – unknown persons wrote hate graffiti on the JW Kingdom Hall in Šabac. Police promised that they will find the perpetrators.

31 May/1 June (during the night) – 713 gravestones were demolished or damaged at the Stapari Orthodox graveyard in Sombor municipality.

31 May – 11 ledgers were damaged at the Jewish graveyard in the Subotica municipality

6/7 June (during the night) – another seven gravestones were demolished at the Subotica Jewish graveyard.

26 June – two windows were broken at the SDA Church in Kula.

29 June (during the night) – unknown persons wrote graffiti containing religious hatred at the JW Kingdom Hall in Negotin. Police promised to find who did it.

5 July – two windows were broken at the SDA Church in Kula.

10 July – eggs were thrown at the Church of Jesus Christ LDS (Mormon) building in Novi Sad. The same incident was repeated on 14 July.

15 July – Two JW women in Smederevo were threatened with a gun during their door to door service, in an apartment building. The man shouted: “Who allowed you enter the building? I will kill you!” In the first instance, the court sentenced this person to three years in prison – but suspended the sentence to one year probation.

3-4 August – twice in a 24-hours period, someone broke into and robbed the Orthodox Church of St. George in Temerin, near Novi Sad.



28 August/1 September – desecration of eight family graves at the Orthodox graveyard in Zaječar.

9 September – unknown person wrote graffiti on the SDA Church in Kać, near Novi Sad, “Demons – go to Hell!”

13 September – a monument of Martin Luther was damaged in front of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Serbia in Subotica. Since this monument was built by the Subotica town council in 2007, the major insisted with the police that vandals are to be found. The Ministry of Religion expressed their regret. The Evangelical (Lutheran) church of Serbia is one of two traditional (recognized) Lutheran churches in Serbia.

3 October – unknown persons wrote graffiti on the JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica. The police came to the scene and took photographs of the graffiti.

4 October – The Evangelical Church in Kragujevac was hit and damaged from stones. Windows and the church name display were targeted.

8 October – a grave cross was pulled out, broken and thrown in front of a chapel at the Catholic graveyard in Novi Sad.

28 October – eggs were thrown at the JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica. The police came and took photographs of the façade and promised that they will try to find perpetrators.

11 November – one car was damaged at the parking of the SDA Church headquarters in Belgrade.

14 November – windows were broken on the SDA Church in Kragujevac.

5 December – 48 gravestones were demolished and damaged at the Bačko Gradište Catholic graveyard.

19/20 December – The Serbian Orthodox Church of Velikomučenice Marine in Atina, near Čačak, was broken into and robbed.

## 2010

Early January – windows were broken at the SDA Church in Kovilj.

1/2 January (during the night) – windows were broken at the SDA Church in Kula.

23 February – several gravestones were demolished and damaged at the Catholic graveyard in Bečej.

27 February – a male JW in Belgrade was diagnosed with a broken rib and a number of lesser injuries, after being attacked by a younger person who previously expressed interest in the Bible. During the meeting this young man became very angry and agitated, stated that the JW’s are sectarians, and then started kicking the Witness and hitting him in the head with fists. The police identified the attacker, and the public prosecutor was considering charges. In November 2010, the public prosecutor decided to drop the criminal charges complaint and gave the JW believer instruction to pursue a personal/civic lawsuit. In November 2010, a private criminal complaint was initiated by the lawyer of the victim. The case is currently in the hands of an investigating judge. It is expected that the investigating judge will call a hearing with the defendant and the victim. Trial is scheduled for 21 May 2012.

End of February – anti-Semitic graffiti was written on the wall of a former synagogue in Pančevo, near Belgrade, signed by “Nacionalni stroj” (Serbian nationalist organization). Police came to the scene.

8 April – insulting and religiously biased graffiti appeared on the local JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica. The police came to the scene, but the responsible persons have not been identified.

7 May – The name plate at the Jewish community was damaged, in Zemun, Belgrade.

2/3 June – eggs were thrown and graffiti appeared at the façade of the LDS Church in Novi Sad. Police visited upon call. 3/4 June, during the night, windows were damaged by stones at the same building. Police visited the site. The same attack was repeated on 4/5 June, during the night. Police visited the site.

12 and also 13 June – repeated attacks on the United Methodist Church in Jabuka, near Pančevo. Incidents occurred during the ethnically-motivated attacks on Roma in Jabuka, since some of the Roma attend this church. For a few days a Serbian gendarmerie unit had to protect the church, while local police protected the house of Pastor Ms. Lila Balovski.

20/21 June (during the night) – the fence in front of the SDA Church in Palić, near Subotica, was destroyed. Police from Subotica investigated the incident and found the perpetrators, who were all minors. The damage is estimated to be 140.000 Serbian Dinars (around 1.400 EUR).

2 July – while two JW were distributing invitations for a gathering in Kragujevac, they met a person who claimed to be a police officer, in plain clothes. He verbally attacked them, threatening that their next

encounter would have more serious consequences. This incident was reported to the internal affairs police department. JW are still waiting for a response.

4 August – After an alleged complaint, two police officers came to a home of a person who invited the two witnesses, in the Leskovac municipality. A complaint was used as a reason to question the JW about their actions and if they had permission to do so in this area. The witnesses explained that their work was in connection with an officially registered religious community and in harmony with the law. The officers ordered JW to immediately leave the area, and then followed them to assure that. Since such actions exceed the officers' authority, the incident was reported to the police department of Internal Affairs. This incident has been officially resolved with the promise that it will not occur again.

15 September – a man began to follow two JW while they were engaged in public ministry, in Lebane, near Leskovac. He approached them and enquired about the nature of their conversations with people, and then began to yell at them and became aggressive. The two Witnesses started to distance themselves from this man while he continued to observe them. This incident was reported to the police.

29 September – While sitting in a car, in Bački Gradac near Odžaci, two female JW spoke with a woman when an Orthodox priest approached them and asked if they were JW. He became angry and insisted that they no longer come, that they should not be seen in that place again and that they should not go from house to house. Apparently, he was impudent and rude. Later in a local school, he warned others of the dangers of sects with special attention given to Jehovah's Witnesses. JW are considering legal measures.

1/2 October (during the night) – windows were broken at the LDS Church in Novi Sad. Police visited the site. Upon this, the LSD church installed video cameras on their building.

4 October – A SDA Church elder in Velika Plana municipality, Srećko Jovanović, was attacked in his home. A group of people, who came with SUVs, forced entry into his house, calling him a sectarian and beat him. The police caught the perpetrators, but the officer who compiled the arrest record repeatedly refused to note the religious reason for the attack and the minutes report was made without it. Center 9 has a copy of a police record about the filing of criminal charges on the bases of article 137.1 of Criminal Law of Serbia – abuse and torture.

30 November (during the night or early morning) – an unknown perpetrator broke windows at the chapel at the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade. The attack came from the street side. Police investigated the attack and took a statement from the graveyard sentry.

During December – the SDA Church in Čantavir was broken into, inflicting minor damage.

4 December – the SDA Church was attacked in Mladenovac. The attacks were repeated in the night of 11/12 December.

31 December 2010/1 January 2011 (during the New Year night) – windows were broken at the SDA pastor's home in Kula. After ringing at the door, attacker banged on the window shutters and shouted "sectarians". Afterwards, stones and one brick were thrown and several windows broken. Police made an investigation and took statements from witness.

## 2011

12 January – Desecrated Jewish graveyard in Zrenjanin.

12 January – anti-sectarian graffiti ("Sects go from here – Sekte marš odavde") was written on the SDA Church in Kula.

16/17 January (during the night) – unknown perpetrators drew swastika and broke a window at the Jewish community center in Sombor. Police is investigating the case and the local community issued a public statement condemning such an act of hatred.

30 January, between 21:30 and 22:00 hours – a new graffiti appeared at the Jewish community center building in Sombor: "Six million more" and graffiti at the car parked in front of the building: "Death to Zog" with a mixed David star.

In early January (exact date unknown) – two-winged entry doors stolen including one prayer carpet from a mosque in the Belgrade settlement Borča. Perpetrator arrested but not processed as the amount of the stolen property was smaller than 150 EUR (196 US \$).

February – Fence to the street to protect the Kingdom Hall (JW) in Ruma was damaged by several young men. The police were at the scene. The perpetrators have not been found.

18 February – Broken window on a mosque in Šabac.



22 February – graffiti on a mosque in Šabac („Srbija Srbima“ – “Serbia to the Serbs” in Cyrillic alphabet). Police found a perpetrator within two weeks.

22 February – graffiti of intolerance written at the entrance door of a Protestant Christian Fellowship in Temerin near Novi Sad.

24 February – During a live broadcast of a reality TV show “Dvor” at national-wide Pink TV, participants Maja Nikolić and Miloš Bojanić made anti-Jewish statements. Owner of the TV station apologized for it and made a court settlement with the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia.

11 March – RTS reported about problems on the 350 years old Jewish graveyard in Niš, as it is now a Roma settlement. Sarcophagus of the Rahamim Naftalija Gedalje serves as table on the yard.

Because of this on 28 December 2011 Federation of the Jewish Communities sent open letter to the City Major of Niš, to the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora, to the Ministry of the Culture and other state institutions.

19/20 March – the SDA Church in Mladenovac was attacked by a group of young people who threw stones. Police could not find the attackers even after receiving the quality video material from a security camera. Center 9 is in possession of the record.

30 March – anti-sectarian graffiti (Stop to sect) was written at the SDA Church in Čuprija, and signed with the “Obraz” mark. Police made an investigation but was unable to find the perpetrators.

April – Belgrade Jehovah Witness Kingdom Hall was attacked by an unknown group of young men who broke several spotlights and tried to throw Molotov cocktail for a greater damage. Fortunately they failed. Police conducted an extensive investigation because of the use of flammable liquids, but the perpetrators have not been found.

10/11 June – at the facade of the new built SDA Church in Indija anti-sectarian graffiti was written. Four masked persons were recorded on a security camera but never founded.

August – During the night, an unknown individual or more entered the courtyard of the Kingdom Hall (JW) in Batajnica near Belgrade and on this occasion broke a wooden fence, a gutter on the building and scattered trash in front of the building. Police who conducted an investigation.

5 September – around 4.30AM a group of hooligans attacked a mosque in Borča – Palilula municipality of Belgrade. Windows were broken on the front side. At the same time attackers tried to enter into mosque and made a fire burning car tires. Police found one attacker (same person as for attack in February 2011). The trial court decision was cancelled by a Court of Appeal in February 2012.

In early October – Center 9 found anti-Semite graffiti “Smrt Jevrejima” – “Death to Jews” in a Belgrade municipality of Karaburma and reported. No action taken.

October – On the outer wall of the JW Kingdom Hall in Sremska Mitrovica written graffiti with Serbian nationalistic content. Police informed.

October 13 – two young men entered the yard of the Kingdom Hall in Leskovac. At first they verbally assaulted one of the members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and then punched him hard in the face and knocked him to the ground. As he laid both started kicking him. After calling for help the attackers fled. The Police and ambulance were called. The victim suffered a broken nose. This violation qualifies as serious bodily harm. Police is working on discovering the identities of the perpetrators of this crime.

November – A group of underage young boys violently enter the Kingdom Hall in Požarevac and made damage on a few of flowerpots. At the same time they have taken off board with the text “Jehovah Witness – the Kingdom Hall” and broke it. A part was left into yard and other part was taken out of yard and was never founded. Police found attackers. One of them was processed for vandalism. Jehovah Witness applied to the Higher public prosecutor for breaking of article 317 of Criminal Code (spreading religious hate and intolerance – breaking religious mark)



30 November – Desecrated Jewish graveyard in Priština, Kosovo. Federation of the Jewish Communities of Serbia told Center 9 that all Jews left Priština in 1999. Most of them live now as refugees in central Serbia.

In December Israeli ambassador in Serbia issued a public statement for graffiti on a Beovoz train-car. This train was for a few days regularly transporting passengers. The Serbian railway company stated that no one saw it and that also it was not reported to them.



Branko Bjelajac contributed to this article.



2012, Center 9, Belgrade, Serbia

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