**Jewish Graves Vandalized In Slovakia**

At least [59 Jewish gravestones](https://cnn.com/2019/12/04/europe/france-jewish-cemetery-swastikas-intl/index.html) and monuments were vandalized in [northern Slovakia](https://cnn.com/2019/04/05/opinions/slovakia-president-caputova-nationalism-maltby/index.html), local police said, calling the crime "monstrous" and the resulting spiritual damage "incalculable."

The tombstones were tipped over and broken up in the Jewish cemetery in Namestovo, near the Polish border, the leader of Slovakia's Jewish community said.

Non-Jewish locals had been taking care of the cemetery for decades, since the local Jewish community was murdered in World War II, Richard Duda said in a statement.

"The tombstones remained untouched for many decades and survived the Second World War, which took away those whose descendants would be caring for the graves of their loved ones today," Duda said.

"The locals realized that relatives could no longer take care of the graves because they flew up the chimney," he said, in a reference to the ovens where Jews were burned in the Holocaust.

"The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia asks all decent citizens of Slovakia not to remain silent," he said.

Karol Kurtilík, who heads the civic association Pamätaj (Remember), said he hoped the monuments would be restored quickly and that a new security systems would be installed at the cemetery. "So that this never happens again," he added in a post on the

Pamätaj has been taking care of the cemetery for years, and Kurtilík said the unknown vandals had destroyed a near decade-long restoration work of the association.

"Such [a] terrible act of vandalism is something that hasn't happen even during Second World War," he added.

The World Jewish Congress lamented the attack, which was discovered on Monday, pointing out it was a relatively rare event in the country.

"The Jews of Slovakia have in recent years been fortunately spared of overtly aggressive expressions of anti-Semitism, but it has become sadly clear that in the climate of xenophobia and hatred spiraling across Europe, every minority community is indeed a potential target for malicious attack," the WJC said in a statement.

"We thank the local police authorities for treating this attack with the severity that it deserves and hope that the perpetrators will be located and brought to justice at once. This was an inexcusable and direct attack against the Jewish community, which must be condemned at the highest levels."

Police said Tuesday they were opening a criminal investigation for the offense of desecration of final resting places.

**12 protesters killed in Baghdad as cleric warns against 'foreign interference'**

At least 12 demonstrators were killed and 22 others wounded Friday when gunmen in several vehicles opened fire on a protest site in central Baghdad, medical sources and activists told CNN, marking one of the most violent days in the Iraqi capital for weeks.

As thousands of anti-government demonstrators rallied in Baghdad's Tahrir Square -- the epicenter of the protest movement -- the gunmen seized a nearby parking garage that is used by activists.

The gunmen have not yet been identified.

An ambulance arrives in Tahrir Square after gunmen opened fire on anti-government protesters.

Hundreds of members of pro-government militias have descended on Tahrir Square in a show of force over recent days, raising fears over further unrest, several activists told CNN.

During his weekly Friday sermon, Iraq's top Shiite cleric warned against meddling, saying that the country's new premier must be chosen "without any foreign interference." The clock is ticking for lawmakers to replace [Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi](https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/29/middleeast/iraq-prime-minister-resignation-intl/index.html), who announced his resignation last week, calling on Iraq's government to "preserve the blood of its people" and "avoid slipping into a cycle of violence, chaos and devastation."

News of Abdul Mahdi's departure was greeted in Baghdad's Tahrir Square with fireworks.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has previously condemned the killing of unarmed protesters, as well as the government's failure to handle the demonstrations, sparked over endemic corruption, high unemployment, inadequate public services and Iran's interference in the country. Protesters blame Iran for being complicit in the Iraqi government's failures, and now its crackdown.

Al-Sistani's remarks came on the same day that the [United States imposed sanctions](https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/06/politics/state-mideast-iraq-briefing/index.html) on four Iraqis, including "three leaders of Iran-backed militias" over corruption and human rights abuses. According to a statement released by the Treasury Department, the militias were behind the killing of dozens of peaceful protesters.

"Iraqis have played a step and bloody price" because of the Iranian regime's involvement in the country, assistant secretary of state David Schenker said.

Schenker noted that Qassem Suleimani, leader of Iran's elite Quds Force, has recently been in Iraq in part "to determine the next political leader of Iraq."

"It is not normal," Schenker said. "This is unorthodox ... a huge violation of Iraqi sovereignty."

Some 432 people have been killed since anti-goverment demonstrations began in Iraq on October 1, according to a source with the Independent High Commission for Human Rights of Iraq. Another 19,136 people have been injured in the demonstrations, the Commission has said.

Activists are calling for the government to step down and hold early elections under direct supervision of the United Nations, in response to the deadly crackdown.

# New Zealand police say two bodies may never be found after White Island volcano eruption.

The bodies of two people missing after a volcano erupted on New Zealand's White Island last week likely washed out to sea and may never be found, police said Wednesday.

White Island, also known as Whakaari, erupted on December 9 while 47 people were visiting the volcano, which is about 48 kilometers (30 miles) off the coast of New Zealand's North Island. At least 16 people were killed and two others remain unaccounted for.

They are Australian tourist Winona Langford, 17, and New Zealander Hayden Marshall-Inman, 40, who was a tour guide.

Police Deputy Commissioner Mike Clement told a news conference on Wednesday that a dive squad and helicopters will continue to search for the two missing bodies for a day or two longer.

"The reality is we have to wait for Mother Nature to produce those bodies, and it may and it may not. And the reality is, we'll be here if it does," he said. "We are literally in the hands of the sea."

Clement said police believe the bodies were near a stream on the island. Based on tidal patterns, the bodies may have washed out to sea, likely towards New Zealand's East Cape, he said.

But there's no guarantee the bodies will make landfall -- they may drift out to the Southern Ocean, he added.

On Friday last week, authorities recovered the bodies of six of the eight people who were missing following the eruption. Two other members of the Langford family died in the eruption, and another remains in hospital in Australia, according to police.

Marshall-Inman's brother Mark Inman has expressed frustration with the decision not to return to the island sooner. For days after the eruption, New Zealand authorities said it was too dangerous to return to the island as there was a risk of another eruption.

People from all over the world were caught up in the eruption, which happened with little warning.

Of the victims who have been named, two are New Zealand citizens, and 15 are either Australian citizens or permanent residents of that country.

As of Monday, 14 people remained in hospital around New Zealand, with 10 in a critical condition. Last week, 13 patients were transferred to hospitals in Australia, although one person later died.

Questions have been raised over how safe it was for tourists to be on the island, and whether more could have been done to prevent the tragedy.