



Chile

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles and a population of 15 million. According to the most recent census (2002), 70 percent of the population over age 14 identify themselves as Roman Catholic, and 15.1 percent as evangelicals. In the census, the term "evangelical" referred to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox Church (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of evangelicals are Pentecostal. Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist churches are also present.

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census are Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). Of those surveyed, all other religions total 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent, and atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constitute approximately 8.3 percent (931,990). The Baha'i were not mentioned in the census, but adherents estimate the number of practitioners at 6,000. There is also a small Buddhist population as well as a very small number of Unification Church members.

Indigenous people make up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identify themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and traditional healing practices.

Members of the largest religious groups (Catholic, Pentecostal and other evangelical churches) are numerous in the capital and are also found in other regions of the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepción, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques are located in Santiago and Iquique, with a third under construction in Coquimbo.

Foreign missionaries operate freely.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. Government officials attend Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, four Catholic holy days are celebrated as national holidays: the Feast of the Virgin of Carmen, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The law allows any religious group to apply for legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state cannot dissolve it by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that has registered under the 1999 law has subsequently been deregistered.

In addition the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and by-laws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations.

Seventy-five religious organizations registered under the 1999 law and gained legal public right status during the period covered by this report, bringing the total to 1,143 religious groups and related organizations registered. This number includes the Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, and Seventh-day Adventist), Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, and mosques.

Schools are required to offer religious education twice a week through middle school; participation is optional (with parental waiver). Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Catholic. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and religious education in faiths other than Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although the Ministry of Education has approved curriculums for 14 other denominations, 92 percent of public schools and 81 percent of private schools offered instruction based only on the Catholic faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The 1999 law on religion grants other religions and denominations the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Catholic chaplains in hospitals, and if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other religions. There were 35 Catholic chapels, 40 paid Catholic chaplains, 25 volunteer Catholic chaplains, and 1,200 religious or lay volunteers authorized to conduct Catholic religious activities in the prison system. There were 9 paid evangelical Christian chaplain positions at the national level, 88 volunteer chaplains, and over 1,200 evangelical Christian volunteers representing 82 evangelical denominations conducting religious activities in the prison system. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals continued to improve over the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. The armed forces unofficially integrated a number of Protestant and evangelical Christian chaplains but continued to block efforts by non-Christian religious groups to provide military chaplains. Military regulations implementing the 1999 law were under discussion but had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career; in the Navy it is allegedly almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts.

In 2005 the Government denied full religious nonprofit status to the Unification Church, which continued to operate and worship under a more limited nonprofit organization status during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

There were several reports of anti-Semitic incidents, including spray-painted graffiti of swastikas and derogatory comments directed at Jewish individuals and institutions. Stores with Jewish proprietors in Chillán were painted with swastikas; anti-Semitic reading material was placed in the vicinity of a Jewish home for the elderly; anti-Semitic messages were sent to the Santiago office of a Jewish organization; and the Sephardic website was hacked and defaced. In addition street gangs identifying themselves as neo-Nazis or "skinheads" and often utilizing swastikas and other anti-Semitic symbols were involved in violence against non-Jewish victims in Santiago and other urban areas. There were no reports that these groups were involved in gang-related violence directed at the Jewish community.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives met with a wide range of religious leaders, including Santiago's Catholic Archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. The Embassy also continued to maintain informal contact with representatives and leaders of several other religious groups.

Released on September 14, 2007

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90246.htm)