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Argentina

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

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The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,068,302 square miles and a population 41.3 million. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation are difficult to obtain due to legal prohibitions on including religion in the census; however, data from a study conducted by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology released in 2008 produced the following estimates: Roman Catholics, 76 percent of the population; agnostics or atheists, 11 percent; and Pentecostals, 8 percent. Baptists, Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and adherents of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God total less than 5 percent of the population.

The Islamic Center estimates that one of every three Middle Eastern immigrants is Muslim. Descendants of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, approximately half of whom are Orthodox Catholic or Maronite, constitute a significant portion of the

population with Middle Eastern roots. The Muslim community is composed of 400,000 to 500,000 members, of whom 60 percent are Sunni, 30 percent Shiite, and 10 percent Alawi, which is a branch of Shia Islam.

Leaders of diverse religious groups noted the recent growth of evangelical Protestant communities due to conversion, principally in newer churches. Religious leaders also noted the effect of global secularization on religious demography.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution (and its partial amendments) and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The constitution grants all residents the right "to profess their faith freely" and states that foreigners enjoy all the civil rights of citizens. The law provides the legal framework for religious freedom.

By constitutional and legal obligation, the government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith" and provides tax-exempt subsidies to the Catholic Church to compensate for expropriation of church property in the colonial era. The Catholic Church enjoys institutional privileges such as school subsidies, a large degree of autonomy for parochial schools, and licensing preferences for radio frequencies.

Both the federal government and the government of the City of Buenos Aires promoted multilateral dialogue with diverse sectors of the community, including religious representatives. From October 13 to 15, the national government sponsored an interfaith colloquium featuring speakers, documentaries, and expositions to celebrate both the Bicentennial and "two centuries of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim interculturalism." In addition President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner met with Catholic Church prelates, Jewish and Muslim groups, and other religious leaders several times during the reporting period. The country is also an active member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

On November 3, the government of the City of Buenos Aires sponsored a seminar on religious diversity that was attended by a number of professors and students representing various religions. On November 25, the city government, the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom, and the national Secretariat of Worship observed Religious Freedom Day during ceremonies in downtown Buenos Aires. The Buenos Aires Directorate General for Religious Affairs and the national Secretariat of Worship both sought to promote religious harmony by sending official representatives to religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashanah and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), a government agency under the jurisdiction of the justice ministry, promotes social and cultural pluralism and combats discriminatory attitudes. INADI, whose board includes representatives of the major religious groups, investigates violations of a law that prohibits discrimination based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, gender, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics." The agency also conducts educational programs, supports victims of discrimination, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination. INADI's religious freedom forum holds monthly meetings with leaders across the religious spectrum.

The Secretariat of Worship is responsible for conducting the government's relations with religious organizations. The law stipulates that a non-Catholic religious organization must register with the Secretariat of Worship as a civic (rather than

religious) association and must report periodically to maintain its status. The Secretariat of Worship considers having a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy as criteria for registration. Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those in homes, but is necessary for public activities. Registration is necessary to obtain tax-exempt status. According to the Secretariat of Worship, 4,500 religious entities were registered, including 462 Catholic groups. Of the non-Catholic entities, 90 percent were Protestant.

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Foreign missionaries of registered religious organizations may apply to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities to request issuance of the appropriate documents.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which may be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches, synagogues, and mosques operated private schools, including seminaries and universities.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The law authorizes seven days of paid leave for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the religious celebrations of the Islamic New Year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations (DAIA) maintains a database that tracks anti-Semitic incidents. The most commonly reported incidents were desecration of Jewish cemeteries, anti-Semitic graffiti, verbal slurs, and other forms of harassment. Jewish organizations also highlighted a trend toward harassment on Internet sites. On July 21, in Junín anti-Semitic graffiti allegedly targeting a Jewish city councilman appeared on the wall of a local office of the Civic Coalition, a national political party. On November 9, a local Jewish association president's house in the city of General Roca was vandalized with anti-Semitic graffiti, along with the local headquarters of the organization. The Jewish Argentine Mutual Aid Association (AMIA), DAIA, and the national minister of education immediately condemned the attacks.

The international investigation of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 persons continued. In 2007, by request of the attorney general, Interpol submitted an official extradition request to Iran for five Iranian suspects residing in Iran. Iran rejected the request, and March negotiations hosted by Interpol between Iran and Argentina failed. In September President Fernandez de Kirchner advocated for the trial of the suspects in a third state tribunal during her address to the UN General Assembly. The Iranian government rejected the request in a September 28 note delivered to the UN secretary-general, claiming that no Iranians were involved in the attacks and Argentina's allegations were unfounded.

In November an appeals court cleared labor leader Roberto Martino of charges for an anti-Semitic attack he allegedly committed outside the Israeli embassy in 2009. Despite the ruling, Martino remained in pretrial detention at year's end on separate charges, which provoked some left-wing groups supporting Martino to block main transit routes in downtown Buenos Aires in protest of his detention.

In February a judge sentenced Juan Carlos Beica, the leader of a minority left-wing party, to a six-month suspended sentence for his role in organizing the January 2009 anti-Israeli demonstrations in Buenos Aires in protest of Israeli military operations in Gaza. The protestors carried signs displaying anti-Semitic imagery outside the Israeli embassy, AMIA's headquarters, and a hotel owned by a Jewish Argentine businessman and treasurer of the World Jewish Congress. On July 21, a Buenos Aires appeals court absolved Beica of the charges and revoked the six-month sentence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers met periodically with various religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and incidents of religious discrimination in the country. Embassy officers attended events organized by faith-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that addressed religious freedom. The U.S. embassy also supported a program to build understanding among youth from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, including outreach to educators and law enforcement officials to enhance their understanding of different religious practices.

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