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Brazil

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

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

According to the 2010 census by the Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil, the country has an area of 3,287,612 square miles and a population of 190.7 million. Nearly all major religious groups are present. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified itself as Roman Catholic. Approximately 15.4 percent of the population is Protestant, an estimated 74 percent of whom are Pentecostal or evangelical, including the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the Quadrangular Gospel, God is Love, Maranata, Brazil for Christ, House of the Blessing, and New Life. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and Congregationalists account for most of the remaining Protestants and are centered in the south. In the 2000 census, 199,645 residents identified themselves as belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); however, the Mormons currently list their membership at approximately one million.

According to the 2000 census, there were 214,873 Buddhists, 2,905 Hindus, and 151,080 adherents of other eastern religions. Japanese-Brazilians, to a limited extent, practiced Shintoism. The census reported 17,088 adherents of indigenous religious beliefs. Members of African and syncretic religious groups such as Candomblé totaled a reported 127,582, while followers of Umbanda totaled 397,431. There were no statistics on the number of followers of Xango or of Macumba; however, the census indicated that members of Afro-Brazilian religious groups totaled 0.3 percent of the population.

The census reported 25,889 practitioners of Spiritualism; however, others estimated that followers of Spiritualism, mainly Kardecists – adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century – constituted approximately 1.4 percent of the population. An estimated 7.4 percent of the population does not practice any religion.

Reliable figures on the number of Muslims do not exist. The 2000 census reported 27,239 Muslims; however, the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil estimates that there are 1.5 million Muslims in the country. There are significant Muslim communities in the cities of São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu (Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay triborder area) as well as in smaller cities in the states of Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The community is overwhelmingly Sunni and almost completely assimilated into broader society. The recent Shia immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu. Sunni and Shia Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants who arrived during the past 25 years from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Conversions to Islam increased during the reporting period among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 80 to 120 mosques, Islamic religious centers, and Islamic associations, many of which are inactive.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil, there are more than 120,000 Jews, 65,000 of whom reside in São Paulo State and 40,000 in Rio de Janeiro State. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

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 other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. Article 5 of the constitution provides for freedom of religion.

The law provides penalties of up to five years in prison for crimes of racism or religious intolerance and enables courts to fine or imprison for two to five years anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist material. It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell literature that promotes anti-Semitism or racism.

In July the Racial Equality Act was signed into law and for the first time explicitly provides for the right to practice religions of African origin. Additionally, members of religions of African origin are granted access to religious professionals in hospitals, prisons, and other institutions.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups, and there is no favored or state religion. Religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

Public schools are required to offer religious instruction, but neither the constitution nor legislation defined the parameters. Religious instruction is optional for students. Each school defines the religious curriculum, usually in agreement with parent councils. The law prohibits public subsidies to schools operated by religious organizations.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen (Carmo), the Assumption, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

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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.

The government restricted access by nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves. Visitors must have permission from the National Indigenous Foundation and an invitation from a member of the indigenous group.

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 Office to Combat Religious Intolerance in the state of Rio de Janeiro received numerous complaints of intolerance; most came from followers of African-based groups, such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

Retired Rio de Janeiro Civil Police Chief Raul Oliveira Dias Alves, arrested in May 2010 for allegedly ridiculing the religious garb of a Muslim woman, continued to await trial at year's end.

Pastor Tupirane da Hora of the Generation of Jesus Christ Church and his follower Afonso Henrique Lobato, arrested in June 2009 in Rio de Janeiro and placed in preventive custody for "intolerance" towards Afro-Brazilian religions, continued to await trial at year's end.

Anti-Semitism was rare; however, there were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, other acts of vandalism, harassment, and threats via telephone and e-mail. Numerous anti-Semitic Web sites continued to operate. Small groups of skinheads, neo-Nazis, and white supremacists operated on the political fringes in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo states, perpetrating harassment and violence toward Jews and other minority groups. Law enforcement agents monitored these groups.

There was no national interfaith movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian and Jewish groups. In 2007 the Protestant-Catholic Group of Dialogue was created. The Group of Ecumenical Reflection and Interreligious Dialogue supported these groups and promoted dialogue at national and regional levels. In 2008 the Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance was formed in Rio de Janeiro, bringing together diverse religious and nonreligious groups including Muslims, Jews, Christians, Spiritualists, atheists, and gypsies. Since 2008, it has organized an annual Walk Against Religious Intolerance in Rio de Janeiro, with more than 70,000 participants in 2010. The Abraham Path Initiative, an international nongovernmental organization endorsed by the UN Alliance of Civilizations, sponsors annual "friendship runs" that bring together Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an effort to increase understanding; more than 10,000 persons participated in the 2010 run in São Paulo.

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. Embassy officials met with many local religious leaders. In September the U.S. consul general in São Paulo hosted an iftar (the evening meal when Muslims break their fast during Ramadan) dinner at his residence and in December attended an event hosted by the Abraham Path Initiative.

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