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## Brazil

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom 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 Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil, the country has an area of 3,287,612 square miles and a population of 193 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 by the Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil 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 church lists its current 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; the Sunnis are almost completely assimilated into broader society. The recent Shi'a immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu. Sunni and Shi'a 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 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

Article 5 of the constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The criminal code enforces protection of religious freedom.

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.

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.

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

It was illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell literature that promoted anti-Semitism or racism. The law enabled courts to fine or imprison for two to five years anyone who displayed, distributed, or broadcast anti-Semitic or racist material.

In 2009 the Federal Public Ministry in São Paulo sought an injunction against television stations Record and Gazette to stop them from broadcasting programs that maligned Afro-Brazilian religions. In April 2010 the court dismissed the case on the grounds that the claim was not ready for adjudication.

In July 2009 a civil suit was filed in São Paulo demanding removal of religious symbols from the public areas of federal buildings. A month later judges of the São Paulo Court of Appeals defended the display of a crucifix on the grounds that "it does not glorify Catholicism but rather is testimony of one of the worst trials in history."

## Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In November 2009 school authorities dismissed Francisco Albuquerque Santo Filho from teaching at a public school in Taguatinga, on the outskirts of Brasilia, for allegedly obliging his students to participate in Candomblé rituals. He claimed that the activity (dancing) was a cultural exercise with no religious basis and filed a discrimination complaint with the Federal District Public Ministry. At the end of the reporting period, there was no further information on the case.

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 religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

## Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

## Section III. Status of Societal Respect for 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.

In 2009 the Commission Against Religious Intolerance, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), published the *Guide to Combat Racism and Religious Intolerance* (Freedom Manual), which contained general guidelines for victims of racial or religious discrimination and explained the implementation of article 20 of law CAO No. 7716 that provides penalties of up to five years in prison for crimes of racism and religious intolerance. The manual was distributed to police stations in the state of Rio de Janeiro to advise officers on how to respond to discrimination complaints. Since the guide was published, at least 180 police officers received specialized training. In January 2010 the civil police of the state of Rio de Janeiro established the Office to Combat Religious Intolerance to register and monitor crimes of religious intolerance as well as to provide guidelines concerning proper procedures to police officers and victims. As a result of the new law and specialized training, civil police classified incidents of religious intolerance as such; previously, there was no separate category for religious intolerance. Police stated that the number of complaints dealing with religious intolerance increased, from 22 complaints in 2009 to 35 cases under investigation at the end of the reporting period. Most complaints were from followers of African-based religious groups, such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

In May 2010 retired Rio de Janeiro Civil Police Chief Raul Oliveira Dias Alves was arrested in the Recreio dos Bandeirantes district for allegedly ridiculing the religious garb of a Muslim woman. He subsequently was charged under the religious intolerance law, which provides for up to three years in prison if convicted.

In November 2009 the Ways of Oxum Umbanda Spiritual Center in Nova Iguacu, Rio de Janeiro State, was vandalized, and a month earlier the religious offering that the center's priest (pai de santo) placed at a crossroads was destroyed. Police investigated both cases but were unable to proceed further for lack of evidence.

In July 2009 the Commission for the Defense of Minorities of the Bar Association in the State of Alagoas filed a complaint against a pastor and a member of the International Church of Hope for allegedly vandalizing an Umbanda temple.

In June 2009 in Rio de Janeiro Pastor Tupirane da Hora of the Generation of Jesus Christ Church and his follower Afonso Henrique Lobato were arrested and placed in preventive custody for "intolerance" towards Afro-Brazilian religions. They

were imprisoned for posting texts and videos on the Internet that fomented prejudice and violence against Umbanda and Candomblé. They were released a month later on their own recognizance. They continued to await trial at the end of the reporting period.

In June 2009 the Commission against Religious Intolerance presented a report to the Brazilian Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality Policies and to the UN Human Rights Council accusing the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God of actively promoting intolerance of Afro-Brazilian religious groups, especially Umbanda and Candomblé. There were no responses at the end of the reporting period.

In 2008 in Salvador, Bahia State, the state court ordered the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God to compensate family members of Candomblé religious leader Gildásia dos Santos for damages related to the death of dos Santos in 2000. The church appealed the Bahia state court decision to the Superior Court of Justice, but in 2009 it upheld the decision ordering the church to pay the family.

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.

The Center for Promoting Islam in Latin America in São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo State, which has a large Shi'a population, reported frequent complaints of verbal harassment of Muslim women wearing veils in public.

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 regional and national levels. The Abraham Path Initiative, an international NGO endorsed by the UN Alliance of Civilizations, sponsors annual "friendship runs" that bring together Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an effort to increase understanding. The first such run was in June 2009 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 January 2010 the U.S. deputy chief of mission visited Kahal Zur Synagogue in Recife, the oldest synagogue in the country, to mark the International Day of Remembrance for Victims of the Holocaust.

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