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Chile

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 a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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 292,260 square miles and an estimated population of 17 million. According to the most recent census (2002), 70 percent of the population over the age of 14 identified as Roman Catholic and 15.1 percent as evangelical. In the census, the term "evangelical" referred to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, the Orthodox Church (Armenian, Greek, Persian, Serbian, and Ukrainian), and Seventh-day Adventists. Approximately 90 percent of "evangelicals" are Pentecostal. Anglican, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed Evangelical, and Wesleyan churches constitute the remaining 10 percent of "evangelicals." Other groups include Bahais, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and members of the Unification Church.

Indigenous persons make up 5 percent of the population. Sixty-five percent of indigenous persons identify themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelical, 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 (Catholics, Pentecostals, and other "evangelicals") are present throughout the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepción, La Serena, and Iquique (there is no synagogue in Iquique). There are mosques in Santiago, Iquique, and Coquimbo.

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.

Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Catholic Church enjoyed a privileged status and occasionally received preferential treatment. Government officials attended Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies. The National Office for Religious Affairs is mandated to work with all religious organizations to provide for the implementation of constitutional provisions for religious freedom.

The law allows any religious group to apply for 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 were not 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 registered under the 1999 law was subsequently deregistered. In addition the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate entities. There are more than 2,000 registered religious groups.

The 1999 law on religion grants other religious groups the same right 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. In the prison system, 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. There were nine paid evangelical chaplains, 90 volunteer evangelical chaplains, and more than 2,000 evangelical volunteers representing 200 evangelical groups.

Regulations for the armed forces and law enforcement agencies allow officially registered religious groups to appoint a chaplain to serve in each branch of the armed forces, in the national uniformed police, and in the national investigative police. As a result, each branch has a national evangelical chaplain in addition to a Catholic chaplain.

A 2002 law on freedom of expression and information and the press prohibits the use of any means of social communication to publish or transmit information designed to promote hatred of or hostility towards persons or groups based on their race, gender, religion, or national identity, and establishes fines for infractions.

Publicly subsidized schools are required to offer religious education two teaching hours per week through high school; although parents may decide to have their children omit religious education. Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Catholic, although the Ministry of Education approved curricula for 14 other religious groups. Schools must teach the religion requested by the parents. However, enforcement was sometimes lax, and non-Catholic religious

education is often provided privately through Sunday schools and other venues. Local school administrators decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. The National Office of Religious Affairs was available to provide assistance to municipal Offices of Religious Affairs to develop community-supported curricula in public schools and provide non-Catholic religious education where appropriate. The lack of non-Catholic religion teachers and funding constraints hindered implementation in all municipalities. Parents may home school their children or enroll them in private schools for religious reasons.

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The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, the Feast of the Virgin of Carmen, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, National Day of Evangelical Churches, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

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 celebration of Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of participating units may be obliged to attend.

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 a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Jewish Community of Chile reported that an increase in anti-Semitic incidents occurred during the reporting period. These included vandalism and graffiti directed at schools and synagogues and harassment and threats against community members, as well as bomb threats and online harassment. In an October 6 press article, the vice president of the Jewish Community of Chile noted various acts of vandalism of homes in Santiago, Lota, and Puerto Montt.

On September 17, police arrested Fabian Torres, a neo-Nazi accused of making threats against the Jewish community and one of its representatives via Facebook. An investigation was pending at year's end.

In early November, the press reported that a private school in Santiago allegedly expelled a nine-year-old Muslim girl because she began using a veil. The Ministry of Education investigated the matter and, on November 8, the school clarified that it would allow the girl to continue her studies there and to wear her veil. The school denied that it had expelled the girl or that any discrimination had taken place.

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 representatives maintained contact with religious leaders from many groups.

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