

CHILE 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Incidents of anti-Semitism included online harassment, verbal slurs, and increased vandalism.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious tolerance with the National Office of Religious Affairs (ONAR) and leaders of numerous religious groups, focusing on the value of deepening institutional cooperation. The embassy organized an iftar with an ecumenical group of religious leaders, and embassy officers attended interfaith events.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2012 census, the population is 16.6 million. Religious affiliation statistics from the 2012 census were not available at year's end. According to the 2002 census, 70 percent of the population over the age of 14 is Roman Catholic and 15 percent is "evangelical," a term referring to all non-Catholic Christian groups except The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox (Armenian, Greek, Persian, Serbian, and Ukrainian churches), and Seventh-day Adventist. Approximately 90 percent of "evangelicals" are Pentecostal. Anglican, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed Evangelical, and Wesleyan groups constitute the remaining 10 percent. Bahais, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and members of the Unification Church collectively constitute less than 5 percent of the population.

According to the 2002 census, 5 percent of the population self-identifies as "indigenous," of whom 65 percent identify as Catholic, 29 percent as Protestant, and 6 percent as "other."

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Church and state are officially separate. The law prohibits religious discrimination. The ONAR is part of the executive branch and is responsible for promoting religious freedom and tolerance. The office's mandate is to work with all religious organizations to implement constitutional provisions on 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 if all legal prerequisites for registration are not satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections the ministry raises or challenge the ministry in court. Once registered, the state cannot dissolve a religious entity by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review, but the government has never de-registered a legally registered group. The law allows religious group to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious group rather than a private corporation. Religious groups may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate entities. There are more than 2,700 registered religious groups.

An Anti-Discrimination Law approved on July 24 gives civil legal remedies to victims of various types of discrimination, including those based on religion or belief. The law also increases criminal penalties for acts of violence based on discrimination.

Publicly-subsidized schools must offer religious education for two teaching hours per week through high school. Parents may have their children excused from religious education. Local school administrators decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. The majority of religious instruction in public schools is Catholic, although the Ministry of Education has approved curricula for 14 other religious groups. Schools must teach the religion requested by the parents. Parents may homeschool their children for religious reasons or enroll them in private schools.

The law grants religious groups the right to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Regulations for the armed forces and law enforcement agencies allow officially registered religious groups to appoint chaplains to serve

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in each branch of the armed forces, in the national uniformed police, and the national investigative police.

The ONAR trains clergy of various religions on hospital protocol and issues government identification badges. A new accreditation process implemented in June for representatives of all religions improves the access of hospital patients to their preferred religious representatives. The prison system has both Catholic and Protestant staff chaplains and a large number of volunteer chaplains.

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.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Catholicism was the dominant religion in public schools, prisons, hospitals, and the military. Representatives from the ONAR held regular roundtable meetings with Protestant leaders to discuss mechanisms to increase Protestant pastoral presence in these institutions. Catholic chaplains outnumbered Protestant chaplains in all branches of the armed forces, and Protestant leaders continued to advocate for more paid chaplain positions.

The celebration of Catholic mass frequently marked official and public events. At military events, all members of participating units were obliged to attend. Government officials attended Catholic events, and major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

In October President Pinera announced the appointment of a rabbi as one of three chaplains serving La Moneda Palace, joining the Catholic and Protestant chaplains there. He also thanked the Jewish community for its many contributions to Chilean society. Members of the Jewish Community of Chile (CJCH) told the press the appointment reflected the country's movement toward greater tolerance and diversity.

Enforcement of the requirement to provide non-Catholic education when parents requested it was weak. As part of a two-phase program, ONAR officials traveled to various regions and met with educators and religious leaders to stress that non-

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Catholic religion classes, specifically Protestant classes, must be offered when requested. The ONAR also provided assistance to municipal offices of religious affairs to develop community-supported curricula in public schools.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Anti-Semitic incidents included verbal slurs, online harassment, and an increase in vandalism. Jewish government officials reported receiving anti-Semitic correspondence. Authorities and Jewish community groups noted an increase in anti-Semitic comments, including via social media.

Street protests over education and other social issues led to increased levels of graffiti including swastikas and other expressions of anti-Semitism in major cities. In January anti-Semitic comments in social media spiked following claims that an Israeli tourist had started a forest fire. Protests in response to events in the Middle East, which normally took place at the Israeli embassy, expanded to the CJCH Center. On January 21, three youths beat and verbally harassed a 23-year-old Jewish man at a party in Ritoque. Others at the party refused to assist the victim or to transport him to the hospital. The CJCH condemned the act.

On August 19, a neo-Nazi group in the Araucania Region attacked a 14-year-old boy and drew a swastika on his stomach with a syringe. In September, coinciding with the Jewish holidays of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, the CJCH in Santiago reported that vandals marked synagogues and schools with swastikas and the phrase “Juden raus,” meaning “Jews out.” The Jewish community noted an increase in anti-Semitism throughout the year and leaders took precautions to ensure their safety.

On August 24, the president of the Palestinian Federation of South America, which represented more than 300,000 Chileans of Palestinian descent, made anti-Semitic remarks to the media, comparing Zionists to Nazis. Neo-Nazi and skinhead groups engaged in gang-type criminal activities and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met periodically with religious leaders and ONAR officials. Discussions focused on the value of deepening institutional cooperation and the importance of passing the new antidiscrimination law, a theme many Jewish leaders emphasized.

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On July 26, the deputy chief of mission hosted an iftar to promote religious tolerance. Forty-four leaders of various religious groups and representatives of other embassies attended. The event emphasized religious tolerance and the role of interfaith dialogue, and honored the Muslim tradition of iftar in a religiously diverse setting.

On November 9, the deputy chief of mission and other embassy representatives attended an annual Kristallnacht (Crystal Night) commemoration ceremony at the Santiago Hebrew School. The deputy chief of mission attended a Kuwaiti government-sponsored event that promoted Islam's peaceful and charitable aspects.

On December 14, the ambassador attended a Hanukkah celebration at La Moneda Palace co-hosted by the minister secretary general of the presidency and the president of the CJCH.