

ECUADOR 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 some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, particularly against Muslims.

U.S. embassy and consulate officials discussed religious freedom with leaders of a broad spectrum of religious groups and promoted religious tolerance and diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 14.5 million, according to the 2010 census by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC). A 2012 INEC survey indicates 80 percent is Roman Catholic, 11 percent evangelical Christian, and 6 percent belongs to other religious groups including Islam, Hinduism, and indigenous and African faiths. Other religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Jews, and spiritualists. Some groups combine indigenous beliefs with Catholicism. Pentecostals draw much of their membership from indigenous people in the highland provinces. Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, many of which are not affiliated with a particular denomination. These groups include the Gospel Missionary Union, now called Avant Ministries, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice (Today Jesus Christ Blesses). There are also practitioners of Santeria, primarily resident Cubans.

There are small numbers of other registered religious groups, including Anglicans, Episcopalians, Bahais, Lutherans, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Presbyterians, members of the Unification Church, and followers of Inti (the traditional Inca sun god).

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.

The constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Interior. A separate presidential decree requires all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including churches and other religious groups, to register with the government. To register with the interior ministry, a religious group must possess a charter, have nonprofit status, include in its application all names used by the group to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission, and provide signatures of at least 15 members, typically leaders of the organization. All nonprofit organizations, including more than 2,200 registered religious groups, must report on the expenditure of any government funding received.

Under the law, public schools are prohibited from providing religious instruction. Private schools may provide religious instruction. The government partially funds some private schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Carnival (the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Muslim leaders reported that members of their community occasionally experienced discrimination when applying for work or housing, or among children at school. The Muslim community countered this prejudice with informational pamphlets explaining Islamic practices and traditions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with leaders of a broad spectrum of religious groups. U.S. embassy and consulate officials discussed the status of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity with Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and evangelical leaders, and met with religiously-affiliated NGOs. Following the September 11 attacks against the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, embassy representatives worked with a local imam to promote religious tolerance and understanding. Embassy representatives also discussed with prisoners their ability to practice their religion while incarcerated.