



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [2010 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » [Estonia](#)

Estonia

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 no 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 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.3 million. The population is 13.6 percent Evangelical Lutheran and 12.8 percent Orthodox. Other Christian groups, including Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, Roman Catholics, and Pentecostals, constitute 1.4 percent. Thirty two percent of the population is unspecified or other, 34.1 percent is unaffiliated, and 6.1 percent does not identify with a religion.

Most religious adherents among the Russian speaking population, who mainly reside in the capital or the northeastern part of the country, are Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, and Christmas.

The Churches and Congregations Act and the Non-Profit Associations and Unions Act regulate the activities of religious associations. The statutes of churches, congregations, and unions of congregations are registered at city courts.

The Churches and Congregations Act requires the commanding officer of each military unit to guarantee defense force members the opportunity to practice their religion. Chaplains extended their services to members of all religious groups. The act also decrees that prison directors must ensure inmates the opportunity to practice their religious beliefs. Defense force members and prisoners exercised this right in practice.

Three police chaplains and a chief police chaplain provided religious services to police officers and other police employees during the reporting period.

A church, congregation, or association of congregations must have a management board. Citizens and legal residents may be members of the board. In order to formally register with the city court, the management board of a religious association must submit an application signed by all members of the board. A congregation must have at least 12 adult members. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes, and a notarized copy of signatures of the board members serve as supporting documents for the registration application.

Basic ecumenical religious instruction is available in public schools. A school must offer religious studies at the primary or secondary level if at least 15 students request it. Comparative religious studies are available in public and private schools on an elective basis.

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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The property restitution process, by which the government transferred religious properties back to religious associations, was carried out under the 1991 Principles of the Ownership Reform Act. The process has largely been completed. By the end of the reporting period, all Orthodox Church properties, including those in use by the Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), were either under the legal control of congregations, were owned by the state, or were the property of local municipalities. The government previously transferred 20 properties to the EOCMP. During the reporting period, the state transferred the final property to the EOCMP.

According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution was not an issue for the community, since most pre-war religious

buildings were rented, not owned.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Although the majority of citizens are traditionally Lutheran, ecumenical services on national holidays, including Christian holy days, and at public events were common. Society is largely tolerant of other religious groups.

Criminal proceedings continued against two individuals charged in 2008 with damaging 44 gravestones, including four crosses in the old Haapsalu cemetery that were under protection as historic memorials.

The government took steps to promote antibias and tolerance education. The government observes January 27 as the annual Holocaust and Other Crimes against Humanity Victims' Memorial Day. The country is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

In 2007 the government cofinanced the compilation of the *Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust*. The guide provides resources to assist in designing classroom programs to observe Holocaust Memorial Day as well as lesson material for history classes.

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. Officials of the U.S. embassy met with the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, nongovernmental organizations, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. During the reporting period, embassy officials continued to engage government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

The U.S. government, in cooperation with the Association of Holocaust Organizations and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, funded the participation of two history and civics teachers in a teacher training program in the United States to foster Holocaust education from July 5-10, 2009.

[Back to Top](#)