



Honduras

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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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 43,278 square miles and a population of 7.8 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 8 percent is indigenous, and the rest is principally of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup reported that 47 percent of respondents identify themselves as Roman Catholic and 36 percent evangelical Protestant. Other sources vary. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The Honduran Fraternity of Evangelical Churches (CEH) represents the evangelical leadership. There are small numbers of Muslims (approximately 2,000) and Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

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.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. The Catholic Church continued developing plans with the armed forces to provide religious chaplains to the military. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions, including the National Anticorruption Commission.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas as national holidays. In 2009, the Government observed the entire week of Holy Week as a national holiday due to a presidential decree.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The Catholic Church is the only "church" recognized under the law. Other religious groups are accorded status as "religious associations" by receiving juridical personality, which provides tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty. The Constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, while new "churches" can be recognized only by an act of the National Congress. Non-Catholic religious groups, including the CEH, have petitioned Congress for recognition as "churches" but operated as religious associations while awaiting a decision.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the CEH for review. This group may suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president must sign the approved resolutions.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The Ministry generally grants such permits.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the Government prohibits immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They neither receive special treatment from the Government nor do they face any restrictions.

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.

The Constitution stipulates that only laypersons may seek election to Congress.

On April 23, 2009, the Ministry of Justice officially banned the religious group Creciendo en Gracia (CEG) and all associated foreigners from operating in the country, declaring that CEG profited from bogus religious activities and caused public disturbances. In March 2009, members of Congress voted unanimously to ban the group. CEG was founded in Puerto Rico by José Luis Miranda, who claims to be the Antichrist and preaches against traditional organized religions.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

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.

The Catholic Church designated the archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the archbishop established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section in his archdiocese. The leadership of the Catholic Church and CEH exerted significant influence over politics and society.

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 a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.