

# **HONDURAS 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. In February the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a controversial law that granted official recognition to a limited confederation of religious groups.

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

U.S. embassy officers regularly met with leaders of religious groups and discussed the religious community's concerns with the government as part of the embassy's overall policy to promote human rights and tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The population is approximately 8.3 million, according to a U.S. government source. There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. A 2007 survey by a Latin American market research and public opinion company reports 47 percent of respondents identify as Roman Catholic and 36 percent as evangelical Protestant. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and evangelical Protestant. 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 Evangelical Confederation of Honduras represents the evangelical leadership. There are approximately 2,000 Muslims and 1,000 Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution stipulates only laypersons may seek election to congress.

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By law only the legislature has the authority to confer the status of a legally recognized church. The legislature recognizes only the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as legally recognized churches. The constitution authorizes the executive branch to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious associations, which provides for tax exemptions and customs duty waivers. The government does not require religious groups to register.

A 2010 law recognizing the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras as a church remains in effect, despite a February Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) decision finding it unconstitutional. This is because by year's end the decision had not yet appeared in the official register. The CSJ ruled on a challenge to the law brought by an evangelical church not part of the confederation.

The government classifies government-recognized religious groups other than the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Confederation as religious associations without the rights and privileges given to churches, such as tax exemption for clergy salaries and state recognition of religious marriages. Associations seeking juridical personality must submit an application to the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population, describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. The secretariat refers the applications of evangelical churches to a group from the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras for review. This group may suggest but not require changes. The office of the solicitor general must review all applications from religious groups and render a constitutional opinion. Applications also require presidential signature.

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 Secretariat of State of Interior and Population.

The law prohibits the 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."

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas.

### **Government Practices**

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There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The armed forces had an official Catholic patron saint. Each military base commander selected either a Catholic or a Protestant chaplain. The chaplains were not military career chaplains but were entitled to a stipend and a military uniform for the duration of their military chaplaincy. Members of prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions.

While the Secretariat of State of Interior and Population generally granted entry and residence permits to foreign missionaries, religious groups reported the secretariat did not grant such permits to missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mormons and Seventh-day Adventist missionaries were able to carry out their planned activities, but the lack of residence permits required them to renew their temporary visas more often.

### **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 archbishop of Tegucigalpa actively promoted ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The Inter-ecclesiastic Forum, composed mainly of Protestant denominations but also including members of non-Christian religious groups such as Muslims, actively organized interfaith discussions of a wide range of issues, including freedom of assembly, interreligious dialogue, and religious parity under the law.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

U.S. embassy representatives maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders from the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, non-Christian religious groups, church-sponsored universities, and other religious organizations. Among topics discussed were issues relating to the state of religious freedom and parity under the law. Embassy officials maintained an open dialogue with government officials in discussing these issues.