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Paraguay

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 157,047 square miles and a population of 7 million. According to the 2002 national census, 89.6 percent of the population was Roman Catholic and 6.2 percent was evangelical Protestant. There are Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Buddhists, adherents of the Unification Church, and members of the Bahai Faith.

The department of Alto Paraná has a notable Muslim community due to immigration from the Middle East, particularly from Lebanon. Mennonite communities flourish in the departments of Boquerón and San Pedro. Members of other religious groups are concentrated in the largest cities, including Asunción, Ciudad del Este, and Encarnación.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The constitution and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion and impose few legal restrictions on religious expression or speech. The constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and freely practice their religion; provide legal protections covering discrimination and persecution; and offer remedies for the violation of religious freedom.

The constitution recognizes the historical role of the Catholic Church. Although the government is secular in name and practice, most government officials were Catholic, and Catholic clergy occasionally spoke during official government events. The government permits political parties to form based on a particular faith. The constitution requires the president, vice president, and members of congress to be laypersons.

The constitution provides for conscientious objection to military service. The armed forces have an extensive Catholic chaplain program supported by the government. The Catholic Church considers this chaplaincy to be a diocese and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis. In 2009 a Protestant chaplain was appointed for the first time.

Although the government does not restrict religious publishing or other religious media, such publications are subject to libel law.

The government requires all churches and other religious organizations to register with the Vice Ministry of Worship in the Ministry of Education and Culture. There is no fee. Registration includes completing required paperwork, obtaining certification as a nonprofit organization, passing financial and criminal background checks, and recertifying annually. Although the government imposes few controls on religious groups, many remained unregistered, typically small evangelical churches with few members.

The government does not place restrictions on foreign missionaries. The immigration process by which foreigners, including missionaries, obtain temporary or permanent residency remains bureaucratic. Applicants must pay fees in excess of 400,000 guaraníes (\$100) per transaction and spend months or even years to obtain permanent residency.

The government permits but does not require religious instruction in public schools. The government permits parents to home school or send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maundy (Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, Virgin of Caacupe Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and 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 abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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. The U.S. ambassador and embassy officials met with representatives of various religious groups.

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