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Peru

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 496,225 square miles and a population of 29.5 million. Among the major religious groups are Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and traditional Protestant denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-day Adventists), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and Muslims. Some indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles practice traditional faiths. There also are indigenous communities practicing syncretic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, such as some Catholics in the Andean highlands.

The 2007 National Census conducted by the National Statistics Institute found that 81.3 percent of the population is Catholic; 12.5 percent Protestant (mainly evangelical); and 3.3 percent includes Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact, a local religious group that is unrelated to Israel or Judaism. In the last 20 years according to some estimates, Protestant (mostly evangelical) representation in the population grew from approximately 2 percent to 12.5 percent; however, the National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, they resided in smaller communities outside of Lima and in rural areas; however, in recent years their presence in urban areas increased significantly. The Israelites of the New Universal Pact religious group has adherents situated in or near Lima. There are approximately 4,000 Jews, residing primarily in Lima and Cuzco. There are small Muslim communities in Lima (mainly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (mainly of Pakistani origin).

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. Article 50 of the constitution established separation of church and state but recognized the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The government acted independently of Catholic Church policy; however, it has a close relationship with the church, and a 1980 agreement with the Vatican maintained the special status of the Catholic Church.

The constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion, but the Catholic Church received preferential treatment in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas, in accordance with the 1980 agreement. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops were exempt from income taxes. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons received remuneration from the state in addition to the stipends paid to them by the church. This applied to the 50 active bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries were located along the borders, representing approximately one-eighth of the clergy and pastoral agents. In addition the government provided each diocese with a monthly institutional subsidy.

The executive branch formally interacted with religious communities on matters of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The ministry implemented laws and interacted with the public through the Office of Catholic Affairs and through the Office of Interconfessional Affairs, which deals with non-Catholic groups. Both offices maintained a continuing dialogue on religious freedom with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Saints Peter and Paul Day, Saint Rose of Lima Day, All Saints' Day, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

A special registry allowed non-Catholic churches that had operated for at least seven years to receive state benefits similar to those of the Catholic Church; however, many evangelical churches lacked central lines of authority and doctrinal unity, which complicated the process of registration. More hierarchical, established church groups supported strict registration requirements. There were 115 religious groups and nine religious missionary entities registered at the end of the reporting period.

As a result of negotiations between the Ministry of Justice and an interfaith working group of non-Catholic religious groups, regulations permitted the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to advise on registration of churches. The registration did not recognize churches officially but identified those religious groups with authority to exercise their rights before government agencies and society in general. The interfaith working group continued to advocate for a law to promote further religious freedom and equality. On December 14, 2009, the Constitution Committee of Congress approved the text of a draft law on religious freedom and equality. Several evangelical groups expressed concern that the draft law showed preference for the Catholic Church; they offered the committee alternate language. The draft law was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Foreign missionary groups operated freely; however, they did not receive the same privileges as the Catholic Church with respect to customs, immigration, and taxation.

The law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism was the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools were granted exemptions from this requirement. The education ministry mandated that the presiding Catholic bishop of an area approve religious education

teachers in all public schools. Parents may request that the principal exempt their children from mandatory public school religion classes.

An official in the Ministry of Justice affirmed that no official document, including the military service record, the voter registration card, and the national identification card, stated an individual's religion.

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.

Ministry of Justice officials stated that the government pays stipends to the Catholic cardinal, six archbishops, and other Catholic Church officials. According to the Office of Catholic Affairs, the government gave the Catholic Church approximately \$867,700 (PEN 2,603,000) annually. Catholic and non-Catholic charities do not pay customs duties; however, non-Catholic groups with extensive charitable activities complained that goods donated from abroad continued to be taxed at commercial rates. Some non-Catholic missionary groups claimed that the law discriminated against them by taxing their imported religious materials, including Bibles, whereas the Catholic Church was not taxed. Catholics and non-Catholics were subject to equal taxation in most activities. All were exempted from paying taxes on places of worship. Buildings, houses, and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church were exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) may pay property taxes on schools and clergy residences. Catholic religious workers were exempt from taxes on international travel. The Freedom of Conscience Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), favored strict separation of church and state and opposed preferential treatment for any religious group.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents were exempted from attending Catholic instruction, students who did so lost academic credits. Students who graduated from primary and secondary schools without these credits could not be at the top of their class, regardless of other academic achievement, and were thus disadvantaged in competition for scholarships and admission to universities.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains. A government decree that created 40 Catholic military positions obliged members of the armed forces and the police, as well as relatives and civilian coworkers, to participate in Catholic services. There were no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. Some non-Catholic soldiers, however, complained that it was difficult to find and attend Protestant religious services because of the lack of chaplains.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2007 the remains of evangelical pastor Jorge Parraga Castillo, who disappeared in 1989, were found at the Manta military base. Witnesses claimed that the military tortured and killed Parraga and then burned his body. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office stated that Parraga's death was not related to his work as a pastor. At the end of the reporting period, no one had been charged in the killing, and the investigation by the public ministry had not produced results.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

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.

Religious groups occasionally joined forces on ecumenical projects on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborated closely in the area of human rights. NGOs such as the Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) of the Catholic Church and the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason. Major political figures promoted religious freedom, and non-Catholic politicians held high profile positions.

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 staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, Protestant groups, and Muslim and Jewish communities. The embassy also continued regular contact with religious organizations including Caritas, CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, CONEP, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

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