



Peru

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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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.

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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. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a local religious group, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is unrelated to Israel or Judaism.

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.

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; in the last 15 years their presence in urban areas increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim communities in Lima (mainly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (mainly of Pakistani origin). The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junín Department, but since his death in 2000 the membership has sharply declined; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima. Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions, especially in the Andean highlands. Some indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths.

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 establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy; however, it has a close relationship with the Church, and an agreement signed with the Vatican in 1980 maintains the special status of the Catholic Church. Critics complained that the agreement was unconstitutional since it was signed with a military government instead of democratic representatives. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high-profile public role.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion, but the Catholic Church receives 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 are exempt from income taxes. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons receive remuneration from the State in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Church. This applies to the 50 active bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the borders, representing approximately one eighth of the clergy and pastoral agents. In addition, the Government provides each diocese with a monthly institutional subsidy.

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

A special registry of non-Catholic religious groups allows non-Catholic churches to receive state benefits similar to those received by the Catholic Church; however, some evangelical church leaders complained about the requirement to operate for seven years before being added to the registry. In addition, many evangelical churches lack central lines of authority and doctrinal unity, which complicates 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 permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to advise on registration of churches. The registration does not recognize churches officially but identifies 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 June 11, 2009, thousands of evangelicals and supporters marched to Congress to draw attention to draft law 1008/2006 - CR Law on Religious Freedom and Equality. The draft law was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely; however, they do not receive the same privileges as the Catholic Church with respect to customs, immigration, and taxation. All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize.

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 is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools have been 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.

In 2008 religious groups and the Ministry of Justice continued to work together to change residency documents that differentiated "religious" status between "Catholic" and "non-Catholic"; the process continues, and some documents

have been changed to "religious" with no reference to a specific 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 gives 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 are subject to equal taxation in most activities. All are exempt from paying taxes on places of worship. Buildings, houses, and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) may pay property taxes on schools and clergy residences. Catholic religious workers are exempt from taxes on international travel. The Freedom of Conscience Institute, a non-governmental organization (NGO), favors strict separation of church and state and opposes preferential treatment for any religious group.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents were exempt 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 for admission to universities.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains. A government decree that created 40 Catholic military positions obliges 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 the death of Parraga 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 continued with little progress.

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 a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In 2008 the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office identified three cases referring to the exemption of non-Catholic students from required religion courses, Catholic baptismal requirements for school enrollment, accommodation of religious days of rest for higher education students, and exemption from military service based on religious belief.

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. The Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS), a Catholic NGO, and the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association--an evangelical NGO--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 in public affairs, 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 the Muslim and Jewish communities. The Embassy also continued regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including Caritas, CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, CONEP, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.