



## Peru

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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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 period covered by this report.

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 28.2 million according to the 2007 census. Among the major religious groups are Roman Catholics, various Protestant denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, and Assembly of God), 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 results of the 2007 National Census had not been published by the end of the reporting period, but a question regarding religious affiliation sparked controversy, and the President publicly recommended that it be left blank. The 2006 National Continuous Census conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INEI) finds that 85 percent of the population is Catholic and 11 percent Protestant; the remaining 4 percent includes Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact. The Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS), a Catholic nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimates that 5 percent of Catholics regularly attend Mass.

In the last 20 years, according to some estimates, Protestant (mostly evangelical) representation in the population grew from approximately 2 percent to 15 percent. 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 (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (mostly 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 people in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths.

#### Section II. Status of 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. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. 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 maintains a close relationship with the Church, and an agreement signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. 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 country's 49 active bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the borders, representing approximately an eighth of the clergy. In addition, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government.

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.

In 2004 the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation to create a special registry of non-Catholic religious groups to enhance religious freedom and equality by allowing non-Catholic churches to receive state benefits similar to those received by the Catholic Church; however, some evangelical churches complained about the requirement to operate for 7 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. Approximately 100 religious groups are registered.

As a result of negotiations between the Ministry of Justice and an interfaith working group of non-Catholic religious groups, regulations now permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to register 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 continues to advocate for a law to promote further religious freedom and equality, in addition to at least three other draft laws proposed by Congressmen. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress had not acted on these drafts.

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 throughout the education process (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; alternatively, they may provide their own instructor.

#### 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 period covered by this report.

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 \$830,000 (PEN 2,500,000) annually. Catholic charities do not pay customs duties. Non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complained that goods donated from abroad are 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 is not taxed. Ministry of Justice officials attributed the taxation problems of non-Catholic charities to incomplete or incorrect paperwork. 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 (PROLIBCO), an NGO, favors strict separation of church and state and opposes preferential treatment for any religious group.

In 2007 religious groups and the Ministry of Justice continued to work together to change residency documents to differentiate between "religious" and "nonreligious" status, rather than between "Catholic" and "non-Catholic."

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 achievements, and were thus disadvantaged in competition for scholarships and for admission to universities.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion for military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating 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 May 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 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 prisoners or detainees 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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. The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) 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 attained higher profiles.

#### 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, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

Released on September 19, 2008

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