



## Uruguay

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

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.

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, 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 68,039 square miles and a population of 3.24 million (according to the 2004 census). The most recent statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that 45.1 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholics, 10.5 percent as Christian but not Catholic, 0.4 percent as Jewish, 0.7 percent as Afro-Umbandistas, and 27.8 percent believe in God but do not claim a religious affiliation. Mainstream Protestants primarily include Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other groups include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, Christian Scientists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. A 2007 study by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association reports a total of 2,113 evangelical churches with 6.1 percent of the population regularly attending. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claims 100,000 members.

The Jewish community numbers between 12,500 and 20,000 members. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo. A 2006 report indicates that approximately 850 families practice Buddhism. The Unification Church is active and has major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. The Muslim population lives primarily near the border with Brazil. An Islamic cultural representative estimated 300 to 400 Muslims in the country but noted that the majority were minimally observant. On April 25, 2008, the Egyptian Islamic Center in Montevideo, which is supported by the Egyptian Embassy, was inaugurated as the first mosque in the country. Muslims also gather to pray at the Uruguay Islamic Center in Canelones. The mosque and the center serve primarily as social hubs for Muslim immigrants who wish to maintain ties to their culture and for native-born citizens who have converted to Islam.

#### 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. The Constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion. The Penal Code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups.

There is strict separation of church and state. All religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. To receive the tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and grants religious status. The group must reapply every 5 years. Once the Ministry grants religious status, the group can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

The Government observes Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays, and employers generally respected this practice.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, which are mainly Catholic and Jewish.

#### 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.

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, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church. There were several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promoted interfaith understanding.

#### 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. Embassy staff met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai B'rith and the Central Jewish Committee of Uruguay. They also met with the leaders of religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Protestant groups.

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