

URUGUAY 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

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.

To promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, the U.S. embassy organized events and roundtables that brought together a wide variety of religious leaders to discuss challenges and potential areas for cooperation.

Section I. Religious Demography

The population is approximately 3.3 million, according to a 2011 National Institute of Statistics (NIS) census. The most recent (2008) NIS statistics on religious preference indicate approximately 45 percent of the population self-identifies as Roman Catholic and approximately 10 percent as non-Catholic Christian. Groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, The Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Afro-Umbandists, Jews, Buddhists, members of the Unification Church, and Muslims (300-400 members). Approximately 28 percent of the population indicates a belief in God but no specific religious affiliation. There is no correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity, politics, or socio-economic status.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion, and there is strict separation of church and state dating to the constitution of 1917. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The National Institute of Human Rights, an autonomous branch of Congress, and the Ministry of Education and Culture's Honorary Commission against Racism,

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Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination require government compliance with the laws. Representatives from several religious and civil society groups are active participants of the Honorary Commission.

Religious groups are entitled to, and typically received, tax exemptions for their houses of worship. To receive tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a non-profit entity and draft organizing statutes. It must then apply to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and may grant authorization for the religious group to request property tax exemption from the taxing authority, usually the municipal government.

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

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students belonging to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government had observer status on the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The Central Jewish Committee reported that the official education curriculum continued to lack coverage of the Holocaust. On January 27, the government aired a special radio program in remembrance of the Holocaust.

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

The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. Traditional Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the

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Catholic Church. There were several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) actively promoting interfaith understanding.

There were some reports of anti-Semitic acts. Incidents included vandalizing a Jewish memorial site and posting anti-Semitic comments on Internet blogs. Jewish leaders reported effective cooperation with police investigating these incidents. They also reported effective cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development in its anti-discrimination training efforts. Ten percent of the Central Jewish Committee's anti-discrimination courses had non-Jewish participants.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy staff met regularly with the leaders of most religious groups and maintained regular contact with a range of government institutions and human rights and religious NGOs engaged in supporting religious freedom, such as the National Institute of Human Rights; the Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination; the Central Jewish Committee; and B'nai B'rith. The embassy hosted events that brought together a wide variety of religious leaders to discuss challenges and potential areas for cooperation, including an event for several different religious leaders on September 11, as well as an event to commemorate Emancipation Day that included members of the Afro-Uruguayan religious community.