



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Chile

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles and a population of slightly more than fifteen million. According to a 2002 census, 70 percent of the population age fourteen or older was identified as Roman Catholic, and evangelicals totaled 1,699,725 persons, or 15.1 percent of the population over the age of fourteen. In the census, the term "evangelical" referred to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox Church (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of evangelicals were Pentecostal. Also present were traditional Protestant churches, including Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist.

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census were Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). All other religions totaled 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent. Atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constituted approximately 8.3 percent (931,990) of the population over the age of 14. The Baha'is were not mentioned in the census, but adherents estimated the number of practitioners at six thousand. There was also a small Buddhist population as well as a very small number of Unification Church members.

Members of the largest religious groups were numerous in the capital; Catholic, Pentecostal, and other evangelical churches were also active in other regions of the country. Jewish communities were located in Santiago, Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there was no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques were located in Santiago and Iquique.

Indigenous people made up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identified themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continued to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicated a high degree of syncretism in worship and persistence of traditional healing practices. Many indigenous people considered these cultural rather than religious practices.

Foreign missionaries operated freely, and many Catholic priests were of foreign origin.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. Government officials attend Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, four Catholic holy days are celebrated as national holidays: Corpus Christi, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The law allows any religious group to obtain legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within ninety days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has sixty days to address objections raised by the ministry or challenge the ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state cannot dissolve it by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of

the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that has registered under the 1999 law has subsequently been deregistered.

In addition, the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and by-laws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations.

At the end of the period covered by this report, 1,068 religious groups and related organizations had registered under the 1999 law and gained legal public right status. This number included the Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopalian), several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, Islamic mosques, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Schools are required to offer religious education twice a week through middle school; participation is optional (with parental waiver). Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Catholic. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and religious education in faiths other than Roman Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although the Ministry of Education has approved curricula for fourteen other denominations, 92 percent of public schools and 81 percent of private schools offered instruction based only on the Catholic faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The 1999 law on religion grants other religions and denominations the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Catholic chaplains in hospitals, and if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other faiths. There were thirty-five Catholic chapels, thirty-nine paid Catholic chaplains, and more than one thousand volunteers authorized to conduct religious activities in the prison system. Prison authorities have established two evangelical Christian chaplain positions at a national level, and every prison has designated evangelical Christian pastoral workers. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. The armed forces unofficially integrated a number of Protestant and evangelical Christian chaplains but continued to block efforts by non-Christian religious groups to provide military chaplains, and regulations implementing the 1999 law had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career; in the navy, it is said to be almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts.

On September 15, 2005, the Supreme Court upheld a March 2005 appeals court ruling that the Unification Church could be denied religious nonprofit organization status on grounds that the Church represented a threat to public order and the family. This was the first time under the 1999 law that an organization's registration was contested for other than technical reasons. The Unification Church continued to operate and worship under a more limited nonprofit organization status and was considering filing a new registration request.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some discrimination occurred.

Ecumenical groups existed, including the Ecumenical Brotherhood of Chile, bringing together diverse Christian churches; the Abrahamic Forum, bringing together Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and the Judeo-Christian Confraternity. These groups organize periodic dialogues to address specific social matters. Universities and seminaries also organize interreligious dialogues and events.

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitic incidents, including spray-painted graffiti of swastikas and derogatory comments directed at Jewish individuals. In April 2006 Rodrigo Goldberg, a non-Jewish soccer player, requested that the Federation Internationale de Football Association impose sanctions on five fans who directed anti-Semitic epithets at him during a soccer match in Santiago. Street gangs identifying themselves as neo-Nazis or "skinheads" were involved in violence and attacks against non-Jewish victims in Santiago and other urban areas.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives met with a wide range of religious leaders, including Santiago's Catholic archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. The embassy also continued to maintain informal contact with representatives and leaders of several other faiths. In addition, the embassy closely followed the denial of religious nonprofit status to the Unification Church.

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