



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Dominican Republic

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, which occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population estimated at 9.1 million. The largest religious denomination was the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to Demos 2004, a population survey taken in 2004 by the Center for Political and Social Studies of the Pontifical Catholic Mother and Teacher University and the Center for Social Studies and Demographics, the population was nominally 64.4 percent Catholic and 11.4 percent Protestant (under which category the survey grouped evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants). In the same study, 22.5 percent of the sample said they had no religion. Demos 2004 also reported that 55.1 percent of respondents considered themselves religiously observant, while 44.3 percent did not practice actively. The Dominican Council of Evangelicals claimed that evangelicals represented 16 percent of the population. Anecdotal evidence suggested that individuals who identified themselves as Protestants and evangelicals were significantly more likely to be religiously observant than Catholics.

There were approximately 300 Jews in the country, of whom 200 were observant. Most lived in Santo Domingo, which had a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. There was a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua, descended from the resettlement of more than 600 European Jewish refugees before the Second World War. Both synagogues were led by the same individual. Various government sources estimated that there were between 5,000 and 10,000 Muslims in the country. There was an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 250 regular worshippers. A few adherents practiced Buddhism and Hinduism. Many Catholics practiced a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (*santería*) or witchcraft (*brujería*), but because these practices were usually concealed, the number of adherents was unknown.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country included Mormons, Mennonites, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other missionaries were nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

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. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The constitution specifies that there is no state religion. The Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, making Catholicism the official religion of the country and extending to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious groups. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and a complete exoneration from customs duties.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exonerations from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exoneration were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders have regularly urged the Government to provide their churches privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church. Catholic weddings are the only religious wedding ceremonies that the Government recognizes.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it was not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading

among their weekly activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall promotion of human rights. Representatives of the U.S. embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority groups.

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