



## Ecuador

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 109,483 square miles and a population of 12.2 million (in 2001). The Catholic Episcopal Conference estimates that 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, with 35 percent of Catholics actively practicing. Although no scientific survey has been undertaken, the Episcopal Conference estimates that attendance at Mass increased slightly during the period of this report. Some groups, particularly indigenous people who live in the mountains, follow a syncretic form of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities. In the Amazonian jungle region, Catholic practices are often combined with elements of shamanism.

The Evangelical Missionary Union estimates that there are one million Protestants. While Protestant conversions traditionally have been among the lower classes, there are growing numbers of professionals converting to Protestantism. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals successfully find converts in different regions, particularly among indigenous people in the Sierra provinces of Chimborazo, Bolivar, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, and Pichincha, especially among persons who practiced syncretic religions, as well as in groups marginalized by society. Other popular evangelical groups include the Assembly of God in urban areas and the Church of the Word of God, which is growing rapidly in indigenous areas. In general, rural indigenous areas tend to be either entirely Catholic or entirely Protestant.

Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, and many of them are not affiliated with a particular denomination. Some multid denominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active for more than 60 years.

Many of the religious groups registered with the Government have very small numbers; these include Anglicans, Baha'is, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Unification Church. Other groups present in small numbers are Muslims, Jews, and adherents of Eastern Orthodox religions. There are also followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god, and some atheists, but there were no reliable statistics on the size of these smaller groups.

In large cities, Protestant megachurches, with more than 10 thousand members, continued to grow substantially. There is a high percentage of mestizo Protestants in the Guayaquil area.

Protestant organizations were usually divided between predominantly indigenous organizations, such as the Council of Evangelical Indigenous People and Organizations (FEINE), and mestizo organizations.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches are present.

## 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 grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice. The only limits imposed by the Government are "those proscribed by law to protect and respect the diversity, plurality, security, and rights of others." The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government requires religious groups to be licensed or registered if they engage in proselytizing activity. Religious organizations that do not engage in such activity may still choose to register to obtain a legal identity, which is desirable when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must possess a charter, have nonprofit status, include all names used by the group (to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission), and provide signatures of at least 15 members. In addition, groups must file a petition with the Ministry of Government, using a licensed attorney, and pay a \$100 registration fee. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to streamline the registration process for religious groups.

The Government permits missionary activity and public religious expression by all religious groups.

The Government does not generally permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools have complete liberty to provide religious instruction, as do parents in the home.

### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Catholics reportedly complained that the Government restricted access for ecological reasons to the Galapagos Islands to the extent that foreign missionaries had difficulty ministering to the 14,500 resident Catholics.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

### Abuses of Religious Freedom

On August 27, 2006, two military officers (Ivan Santi Mucushigua and Cervantes Santamaría Cuji) and a civilian (Lucio Cirilo Dahua) allegedly killed Balti Cadena, a traditional healer (yachak), and injured one of his sons, near the Amazonas Military Fort in Puyo, Pastaza Province. The Public Prosecutor, in a civilian court, charged the two military officers with murder. At the end of the reporting period, the officers were held at the Amazonas Military Fort and had appealed to the Superior Court of Puyo. Press reports added that at least four traditional healers have been killed in the past 10 years in the same area.

### 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 belief or practice. Many religious groups increased their outreach efforts to their counterparts during the period covered by this report.

## 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 staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, and various Protestant groups to monitor the status of religious freedom.

Released on September 14, 2007

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)