



## Paraguay

### 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 and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 157,047 square miles and a population of 6.7 million. According to the Government's 2002 national census, the population identified itself as follows: 89.6 percent Roman Catholic, 6.2 percent evangelical Christian, 1.1 percent other Christian, 0.6 percent indigenous religions, 0.3 percent other (non-Christian) religions, 1.1 percent non-religious, and 1 percent unknown. A 2006 survey indicated similar results; however, 84.7 percent of respondents considered themselves Roman Catholic, a decrease of 4.9 percent from 2002.

Prominent religious groups include Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Jewish (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Baha'i. The eastern Department of Alto Parana has a large Islamic community as the result of substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly Lebanon. A large Mennonite community flourishes in the western Department of Boqueron.

#### 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 and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion or exercise thereof.

The Constitution recognizes the historical role of the Catholic Church (the dominant religion) in public life, and Catholic priests often celebrate Mass at government functions.

The following holy days are official national holidays: Maundy (Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (now known as the Founding of Asuncion), Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (now known as the Virgin of Caacupe Day), and Christmas.

All religious organizations and churches must register with the Ministry of the Interior. The criteria for recognition consist of completing required paperwork, obtaining certification as a nonprofit organization, passing financial and criminal background checks, and paying a small fee. The Government imposes few controls on religious groups, and many churches remain unregistered. These are typically small, Christian evangelical churches with few members.

The Government is secular. Most government officials are Catholic, but adherence to a particular creed confers no legal

advantage or disadvantage. The Armed Forces have an extensive Catholic chaplain program. The Catholic Church considers this chaplaincy as a diocese and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis.

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government imposes no curriculum requirements regarding religion.

#### 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.

#### Anti-Semitism

In March 2007 unknown individuals spray-painted graffiti conveying messages and/or images commonly associated with anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism on the private property of a well-known radio commentator of Jewish descent. The Government investigated this case but made no arrests.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

#### 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. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with representatives of different religious groups. Embassy representatives raised concerns with the Government over the graffiti incident.

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