



## Peru

### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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 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 496,225 square miles and a population of approximately 27.2 million. Among the major religious communities were the Roman Catholic, various Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Anglican, Assembly of God, and many others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Baha'i Faith, Hare Krishna, and Islam. There also were indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local faith, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is not connected to Israel or the Jewish faith. The 2006 Continuous National Census performed by the National Statistics Institute (INEI) found that 85 percent of the population that identified with a religion was Catholic, 11 percent was evangelical, and the remaining 4 percent included Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact. Based on 1993 census data, INEI estimated that adherents of non-Christian faiths accounted for approximately 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constituted 1.4 percent. The Catholic nongovernmental organization (NGO) Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimated that only 15 percent of Catholics regularly attended weekly church services.

The memberships of most religious groups remained at fairly constant levels; however, various evangelical Christian denominations had rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last twenty years their representation grew from 2 to 3 percent of the population to 10 to 15 percent.

The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimated that evangelicals represented at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, evangelicals resided in areas outside of Lima, the capital, and in rural rather than urban areas; however, in the last fifteen years, their numbers in urban areas increased significantly. There were small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim populations in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

Some Catholics combined indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion was practiced most often in the Andean mountain highlands. Indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practiced traditional faiths. The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents were concentrated in and near Lima.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and several evangelical organizations, operated freely throughout the country, although they did not receive the same treatment in the areas of customs, immigration, and taxation given to the Catholic Church.

#### 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. Article 50 of the constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The government acts independently of Catholic Church policy. Nonetheless, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Non-Catholic critics complain that the concordat was executed between the Vatican and the last military government and thus does not reflect the current democratic vision of equality. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high profile role in the public sector.

The constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, preferential treatment is given to the Catholic Church in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas in accordance with the concordat. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Real estate, buildings, and houses owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) must pay property taxes for schools and clergy.

residences. Some Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Catholic Church. This applies to the country's fifty-two bishops as well as priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. In addition, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial.

The executive branch formally interacts with religious communities on issues of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The ministry issues resolutions that implement laws, and interacts with the public through an office of relations with the Catholic Church and an office for non-Catholic religions. Both offices, constituting a Religious Affairs Unit, maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups on concerns of religious freedom. The primary functions of the Religious Affairs Unit are to process complaints of religious discrimination and to assist religious groups in relations with the state, such as seeking exemptions from import taxes and customs duties.

In 2004 the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation designed to enhance religious freedom and equality by registering churches and assisting them in receiving state benefits similar to the Catholic Church; however, this registration process has provoked controversy. Before 2006 some evangelical Christian churches complained that the Government made it difficult for them to register because new, independent churches continued to be founded, while government regulations require that a church be operating for several years before it can register. In addition, because many evangelical churches do not have central lines of authority and lack sufficient doctrinal similarities for the Government to group them together, evangelical organizations complained that the registration process required each individual evangelical church to register as a separate religion. Other groups, which were more hierarchical and established, supported strict registration requirements as a deterrent to fraudulent or misleading registrations.

In 2005 the Ministry of Justice convened an interfaith workgroup of representatives from the religious faiths to discuss the reform of laws that infringe upon the rights of religious communities and to strengthen relations between the state and non-Catholic religions. The Ministry of Justice and the religious groups together clarified the registration policies. The regulations permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP, and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru to register their member churches as one group. The registration is not intended to recognize churches officially but to identify which should receive administrative assistance from the Religious Affairs Unit in relations with the state (for example, tax-free donations). By the end of 2005 the interfaith workgroup developed a draft law to promote further religious freedom and equality. The Ministry of Justice sent this legislation to Congress for its consideration. Independently, congressmen have proposed at least three other draft laws on religious freedom. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress had not taken actions on these draft laws.

All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. During the period covered by this report, the unit did not receive any discrimination complaints.

The law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum throughout the education process (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry has made it mandatory for public school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding Catholic bishop of the area.

Parents who do not wish their public school children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. Non-Catholics who wish their children to receive a religious education in their own faith are free to organize such classes, at their own expense, during the weekly hour allotted by the school for religious education; however, they must supply their own teacher.

### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

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

The Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors strict separation of church and state and opposes the preferential treatment accorded to the Catholic Church, claimed that the financial subsidies and tax benefits given to the Church were far more widespread and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Some groups complained that Catholic bishops, for example, received government expense allowances for which the bishops do not have to account. Ministry of Justice officials stated the highest payment was for bishops at \$300 (990 soles) per month, while other Catholic Church officials received a fraction of that amount.

Catholic charities do not have to pay customs duties; however, non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complained that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Ongoing registration reform and Ministry of Justice assistance is designed to facilitate duty-free import of charitable goods.

In 2004 and 2005 some evangelical missionaries cited immigration discrimination as impinging on religious freedom. Residency documents show an immigrating Catholic priest to be in a "Religious-Catholic" category, but there is no category for non-Catholic religious officials. As a result, clergy or missionaries from non-Catholic faiths may go through a lengthy immigration process from which Catholics are exempt, including a requirement to leave the country every six months and reapply for a visa. According to evangelical leaders and the Justice Ministry, the immigration problems have become less common thanks to flexibility from the immigration agency on the need for missionaries to represent religions registered with the Ministry of Justice. There were no reports that non-Catholic clergy were denied admission because of their religious status. At the end of the period covered by this report, religious groups and the Ministry of Justice were working to add a category for "Non-Catholic Religious Worker" to immigration regulations.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents may be exempted from attending Catholic instruction, the students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class regardless of other academic achievements they attain. These students are then disadvantaged in competitions for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion of military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating forty Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as their civilian coworkers and relatives, to participate in such services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor have there been any reports of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. However, as the number of non-Catholic Christians increases in the military, reflecting the increase in the number of evangelical Protestants nationwide, non-Catholic soldiers segregated in barracks have found it difficult to attend religious services when no chaplains or chaplains' assistants exist for them.

Some non-Catholic missionary groups claimed that the law discriminated against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles that they bring into the country, while the Catholic Church was not taxed on such items.

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.

Religious groups occasionally joined forces on ecumenical projects on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborated closely in the area of human rights. The Catholic Church used evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when there was no priest available. The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and CONEP (through its loosely affiliated Peace and Hope Evangelical Association) have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason.

The fringe political movement Ethnocacerism published a bimonthly newspaper which included anti-Semitic statements as well as accounts that minimized the Holocaust and promoted admiration for Adolf Hitler's strong "nationalist" leadership. The paper received increased attention because it was named *Ollanta* after Ollanta Humala, who subsequently declared his candidacy for the presidency. In late 2005 publishers changed the paper's name to *Antauro* after Ollanta Humala distanced himself from his brother, Antauro, the newspaper's editor and one of its main contributors.

### **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, Protestant groups, and the Jewish community. The embassy also continued to maintain regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

Released on September 15, 2006

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)