



Uruguay

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 68,039 square miles and a population of 3.2 million. While the Government keeps no statistics concerning religious affiliation, a 2004 survey published in the daily newspaper *El Pais* reported that 54 percent of those interviewed designated themselves as Roman Catholics, 6 percent as evangelical Protestants, 5 percent as Protestants, 9 percent as believers without a religious affiliation, and 26 percent as nonbelievers. The mainstream Protestant minority is composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2006 a religious-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) estimated that 400,000 persons considered themselves to be evangelical Protestants. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claimed 100,000 members.

There are approximately 25,000 Jews. According to local Jewish leaders, since 2002 the number of Jews has declined due to emigration. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo. An April 2006 newspaper report indicated that approximately 850 families practice Buddhism. The Unification Church is active and has major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. The Muslim population lives primarily near the border with Brazil. An Islamic cultural representative estimated 300 to 400 Muslims in the country but noted that the majority were minimally observant.

Missionaries were present and reported no difficulties obtaining visas for religious work.

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 law prohibit discrimination based on religion. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups.

There is strict separation of church and state. All religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. To receive the tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and grants religious status. The group must reapply every 5 years. Once the Ministry grants religious status, the group can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

The holy days of Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as official national holidays but with secular names.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays, and employers generally respected this practice. While there are no mosques in the country, there are two Islamic Centers: the Egyptian Islamic Center in Montevideo, which is supported by the Egyptian Embassy, and the Uruguay Islamic Center in Canelones. The overall activity at these centers is low, and they serve primarily as social hubs for Muslim immigrants who wish to maintain ties to their culture.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, which are mainly Catholic and Jewish.

Foreign missionaries faced no special requirements or restrictions.

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

Jewish leaders noted a significant increase in the quantity of anti-Semitic graffiti. Police cooperated in investigating these incidents. A Jewish cemetery in Montevideo was vandalized, and anti-Semitic graffiti appeared for the first time in the second largest city. In September 2006 four persons were arrested in connection with anti-Semitic graffiti. Authorities had not resolved the case by the end of the reporting period.

On April 17, 2007, a draft law was unanimously adopted accepting the adoption of International Holocaust Memorial Day as approved by the United Nations in early 2006. The law also condemns any expression of denial of the Holocaust as a historical event.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church. There were several NGOs that promoted interfaith understanding.

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. Embassy staff met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai B'rith and the Israeli Central Committee of Uruguay. They also met with the leaders of religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Protestant groups.

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