



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Uruguay

#### 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 68,039 square miles and a population estimated at 3.2 million. While the Government keeps no statistics concerning religious affiliation, a 2004 survey published in the daily newspaper *El País* 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 mainline Protestant minority was composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches included 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 were approximately 25,000 Jews. According to local Jewish leaders, since 2002 the number of Jews has declined due to emigration. An April 2006 newspaper report indicated that approximately 850 families practiced Buddhism. The Unification Church was active in the country and had major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. There was a Muslim population that lived primarily near the border with Brazil. An Islamic cultural representative estimated approximately 300 to 400 Muslims in the country but noted that the majority were minimally observant. The estimated 4,000 Bahá'ís were concentrated primarily in Montevideo.

Many Christian groups performed foreign missionary work. Groups reported no difficulties obtaining visas for religious work. Statistics indicated that there were an estimated 780 Mormon missionaries from neighboring countries and the United States in the country.

#### 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 five years. Once the ministry grants religious status, the church can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

The religious 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 Friday. A Muslim representative stated that employers generally respected this practice.

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.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 Islamic community, the Mormon Church, and Protestant groups.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)