

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

17 October 2011

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Mexico: the situation faced by Evangelicals, particularly in Yucatán, including their treatment by authorities, freedom of religion, opportunities to proselytize, and the regions in which it is more difficult to practice; whether there have been complaints regarding constraints on religious activities (2002-2011)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to data from the 2010 census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI), 83.9 percent of the population five years of age and over is Catholic, 7.6 percent is Protestant or Evangelical and 4.6 percent does not belong to any religion (Mexico 2010a, 68). Although the Catholic Church still has the largest number of adherents, their numbers have been decreasing for the past 20 years (ibid.). The INEGI data also shows that 89.7 percent of the population was Catholic in 1990, and 88 percent in 2000 (ibid.). Conversely, Protestants and Evangelicals accounted for 4.9 percent of the population in 1990 and 5.2 percent in 2000 (ibid.). Again according to the 2010 INEGI data, Protestants and Evangelicals were mainly located in the states of Chiapas, Mexico, Veracruz, Tabasco, and in the Federal District (ibid. 2010b). The states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla and Yucatán also have larger concentrations of people who speak an indigenous language (ibid. 2010c).

According to data from the Religious Organizations Branch of the Ministry of the Interior (Dirección General de Asociaciones Religiosas de la Secretaría de Gobernación) that appeared in an article published by *El Universal*, there were 21,000 Catholic priests in Mexico in February 2011, compared to 40,000 pastors from various Evangelical Christian organizations (*El Universal* 6 March 2011). According to the Ministry of the Interior's website, two of the goals of the Religious Organizations Branch are to [translation] "guarantee freedom of religion" and "resolve conflicts related to religious intolerance in the country" (Mexico 5 August 2011).

Situation of Evangelicals in Mexico

According to the *International Religious Freedom Report July-December 2010*, published by the US Department of State, Mexican laws and policies protect religious freedom and "the government generally enforced these protections" (US 13 Sept. 2011, Intro.). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, the report does state that there were "some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, usually in small rural communities in the south," mostly in the state of Chiapas (ibid.). According to representatives of the State Council of Evangelical Churches, "incidents of intolerance have become more frequent due to a lack of intervention by state governments" (ibid., Sec. III). The report also states that "[e]ndemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and lack of educational opportunities also contributed to tensions, which at times resulted in violence" (ibid.). According to the report, "evangelical groups were reportedly viewed by some local communities as unwelcome outside influences and economic and political threats" in the central and southern regions of the country (ibid.). The report also states that Evangelicals complained in particular of having their water cut off, being expelled from their villages, and receiving death threats (ibid.). Reportedly, some people were beaten, and homes and churches burned (ibid.).

State of Chiapas

Between 2002 and 2011, there were many reports in the media of Evangelicals being mistreated by segments of society or by the authorities (US 13 Sept. 2011, Sec. III; CNDH 12 Dec. 2010; CNDH 20 Apr. 2010; CNDH 23 Feb.

2010; *El Universal* 15 March 2002).

According to a 2009 article by *El Informador*, a daily newspaper in Guadalajara, 74 Tzotzil [a Mayan people (L'Aménagement linguistique dans le monde n.d.)] families, Evangelicals from Chiquinibalbó, Psthé, Shulbó, Bonché, Nachij, Teshtó and Chequentic, were denied access to public drinking water and electricity (*El Informador* 31 Jan. 2009).

An article in *El Universal* in 2008 reports that a man from Jomalhó, in the municipality of San Juan Chamula, [translation] "was allegedly tortured, hung and buried in 2007 by 30 people who accused him of preaching Evangelicalism" (10 March 2008).

An article published in 2006 by the Mexican news agency Notimex reports that an indigenous Catholic man from San Juan Chamula married an indigenous Evangelical woman (NOTIMEX 13 Jan. 2006). Traditional Catholics, angered by the union, allegedly abducted the man and demanded a ransom for his release (ibid.). According to the article, the undersecretary for Religious Affairs in the state of Chiapas, local authorities and the Public Prosecutor for Indigenous Affairs (Fiscalía Indígena) worked together to free this man (ibid.). Corroborating information regarding this man's death or his release could not be found among the sources consulted Research Directorate.

State of Hidalgo

According to an article published in 2010 in *La Jornada* a daily newspaper in Mexico City, six Evangelical families from Cuatecomaco were driven out of town for refusing to contribute financially to Catholic celebrations (14 Apr. 2010). Municipal officials reportedly gave them two days to leave town, failing which they would be required to pay a fine of 10,000 pesos [C\$771.55 (XE 7 Oct. 2011)] (*La Jornada* 14 Apr. 2010). According to the article, only one man agreed to pay the fine (ibid.).

Two articles published in 2009 report that six indigenous Evangelical families were driven out of Los Parajes, in the municipality of Huejutla, for refusing to sign a document in which they would renounce the Evangelical faith and profess to convert to Catholicism (*El Universal* 14 July 2009; *Milenio* 31 Dec. 2009). According to the *El Universal* article, they were verbally and physically assaulted for refusing (14 July 2009). Furthermore, a group of people, who were encouraged by local authorities, reportedly [translation] "violently invaded" the home of one of the families (*El Universal* 14 July 2009). The article also reports that, according to an official with the Public Ministry, four preliminary hearings were underway for unlawful entry, damage and injury (ibid.). According to an article published in *Milenio*, a Mexico City daily newspaper, the Evangelicals were forced to leave their land and their livestock to seek temporary refuge in a primary school, but were driven from it 20 days later (*Milenio* 31 Dec. 2009). The group of around 30 people then lived in another refuge for more than five months (ibid.). The article also reports that the lawyer for the Evangelical Mission Ministries in Mexico (Iglesia Evangélica Nacional Misionera) approached the local mayor and was told by the latter that he [translation] "could not do anything" (ibid.). A Catholic priest denied that there was any religious conflict and stated that it involved [translation] "issues regarding the community's traditional practices and customs" (ibid.). Additional information regarding these conflicts could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

State of Oaxaca

An article published by *El Universal* in 2008 reports that [translation] "an increase in cases of religious intolerance" led many new Protestant and Evangelical faithful to leave their homes and communities to "find refuge in another country" (10 March 2008). According to the article, an Evangelical couple from the state of Oaxaca, along with some family members and friends, [translation] "were allegedly beaten, insulted, threatened and denied access to public drinking water by municipal officials" before resigning themselves to moving to the United States in 1997 (*El Universal* 10 March 2008). According to the wife, quoted in this article, they could not obtain help from the police since they [translation] "do not like helping Evangelicals" (ibid.). According to the spokesperson for the National Association of Christian Lawyers, there are [translation] "many cases like this one" and most come from the states of [translation] "Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, México and Veracruz" (ibid.). The article reports that local authorities jailed a man two days after he converted to Evangelicalism in 2007 (ibid.). Allegedly, they threatened to strip him and beat him, but he was released the next day without any charges being laid (ibid.). Information corroborating these cases of religious intolerance could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

State of Puebla

In 2011, many sources reported cases of conflict between Catholics and Evangelicals (Agencia ALC 17 Sept. 2011; *Proceso* 12 Sept. 2011; *Puebla Online* 8 Sept. 2011).

According to an article published by *La Jornada* in 2011, officials of the Ministry of the Interior in Puebla [translation] "gave in to pressure from Catholics" and "asked Christian [Evangelical] families to leave the village in the municipality of San Martín Texemlucan" in order to protect these families from a Catholic priest's supporters who were threatening to hunt down and crucify the 50 families (*La Jornada* 12 Sept. 2011). According to the article, an

official stated that they could not ensure the families' safety and he feared that history might repeat itself; eighteen years earlier, Catholics attacked a family and burned down their home because they were practicing [translation] "another religion" (ibid.). This group of Catholics was reportedly urged on by the same priest (ibid.). The article reports that the priest denied encouraging the expulsion of the Evangelicals (ibid.). The article goes on to state that during a meeting between the Evangelical pastor, the Catholic priest and officials from the Ministry of the Interior, the pastor presented a video showing [translation] "attacks led by a group of Catholics and the priest" against the Evangelicals (ibid.). In spite of this evidence, the priest allegedly continued to deny his participation (ibid.). The pastor then reportedly filed a complaint for assault (ibid.). Corroborating information on the families being driven out of the community, or on the complaint that was filed could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

State of Yucatán

The Research Directorate could not find any information on Evangelicals in the State of Yucatán or on opportunities to proselytize in Mexico among the sources it consulted.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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