

ARGENTINA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including reports of anti-Semitism.

U.S. embassy officers regularly discussed religious freedom with community leaders as well as the government. Embassy representatives attended events organized by religious groups that addressed religious freedom and promoted interfaith awareness and appreciation.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 42.6 million (July 2013 estimate). A 2008 study by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology estimates Roman Catholics constitute 76 percent of the population. Baptists, Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) each total less than 5 percent of the population. Leaders of diverse religious groups note the recent growth of evangelical Protestant communities. While exact numbers are difficult to confirm (national census data does not track religious affiliation), the Jewish population is approximately 250,000-300,000 and the Muslim population is estimated to be between 400,000 and one million.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The constitution grants all residents the right "to profess their faith freely." The law provides the legal framework for religious freedom.

By law, the government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith" and provides tax-exempt subsidies to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church

ARGENTINA

receives institutional privileges such as school subsidies, significant autonomy for parochial schools, and licensing preferences for radio frequencies.

The law requires that non-Catholic religious groups register with the Secretariat of Worship as civic (rather than religious) associations and report periodically to maintain their status. To register, the Secretariat of Worship requires religious groups to have a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy. Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those in homes but is necessary for public activities. Registration is also necessary to receive tax-exempt status and to allow foreign missionaries to apply for visas.

Foreign missionaries of registered religious groups need to apply to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities to request the issuance of the appropriate documents.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which may be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches, synagogues, and mosques operate private schools.

The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), a government agency under the jurisdiction of the Justice Ministry and whose board includes representatives of the major religious groups, investigates suspected incidents of discrimination based on religion. The agency also supports victims of religious discrimination and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Government Practices

The Buenos Aires Directorate General for Religious Affairs and the national Secretariat of Worship sent official representatives to religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashanah and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, as well as to religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

INADI's religious freedom forum held monthly meetings with leaders across the religious spectrum.

ARGENTINA

The international investigation of the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Argentine Mutual Aid Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 persons continued. The federal prosecutor investigating the case continued to seek the arrest of eight Iranians for their alleged involvement in the bombing. In January the government signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran to jointly investigate the AMIA case. The government began negotiations with Iran on the specifics of its implementation. The Delegation of Argentine Israelite Associations (DAIA) and AMIA have challenged the constitutionality of the agreement.

On March 19, the municipality of General Campos in Entre Rios province disbursed tax payment receipts printed with the phrase “Be a patriot, kill a Jew.” DAIA called for administrative sanctions and the responsible individual’s removal from office. The mayor of General Campos publicly censured and dismissed the employee immediately.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

DAIA received 243 complaints of anti-Semitism during 2012, the most recent data available, representing a 7 percent decrease compared to 2011. The most commonly reported incidents were anti-Semitic messages posted on websites, anti-Semitic graffiti, verbal slurs, and other forms of harassment.

Local press reported five cases of vandalism occurring in two Methodist churches and three Catholic places of worship. The first incident occurred during a student led demonstration in September when a group of individuals broke into a local Catholic cathedral, vandalized it and set the structure on fire. A wide range of political and religious leaders attended a public mass to express their condemnation of the incident. On November 9, vandals attacked a Methodist Church and destroyed relics of significant historical value.

On November 12, a Catholic protest group interrupted an interfaith ceremony commemorating Kristallnacht at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Buenos Aires. Local Jewish organizations and the Catholic Archbishop of Buenos Aires denounced the protestors.

ARGENTINA

On July 29, swastikas were found painted in the Republic of the Children Park in La Plata, Province of Buenos Aires.

Leaders of the Jewish, Muslim, and various Christian communities publicly welcomed the election of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as Pope.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met periodically with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and incidents of religious discrimination. In meetings with government officials, embassy staff discussed the status of the AMIA case as well as government efforts to advance religious freedom.

Embassy representatives attended events organized by religious groups and nongovernmental organizations that addressed religious freedom and promoted interfaith awareness and appreciation. One example was the Islamic Center of Argentina's Feast of Sacrifice celebration held annually at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.