

# **URUGUAY 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 abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including reports of anti-Semitic acts. Jewish leaders reported effective cooperation with police investigating these incidents.

To promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, U.S. embassy officials continued to include a wide variety of religious leaders in embassy events.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 3.3 million (July 2013 estimate). National Institute of Statistics data on religious preference from 2008 indicate approximately 45 percent of the population self-identifies as Roman Catholic and approximately 10 percent as non-Catholic Christian. Religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, The Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Afro-Umbandists, Jews, Buddhists, members of the Unification Church, and Muslims (300-400 members). Approximately 28 percent of the population indicates a belief in God but no specific religious affiliation.

## **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 and law prohibit discrimination based on religion, and there is strict separation of church and state. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The National Institute of Human Rights, an autonomous branch of Congress, and the Ministry of Education and Culture's (MEC) Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination enforce government compliance with the laws. Representatives from several religious and civil society groups are active participants in the Honorary Commission.

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Religious groups are entitled to property tax exemptions for their houses of worship. To receive such exemptions, a religious group must register with the MEC as a non-profit entity and present draft organizing statutes. The ministry examines the legal entity and grants authorization for the religious group to request a property tax exemption from the taxing authority, usually the municipal government.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students belonging to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty.

The government has observer status on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

### **Government Practices**

The Central Jewish Committee reported that the official education curriculum continued to lack coverage of the Holocaust. On January 27, the government aired a special radio program in remembrance of the Holocaust.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

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

There were reports of anti-Semitic acts. Incidents included vandalism at a Jewish memorial site, swastikas painted on walls, and anti-Semitic comments on Internet blogs. Jewish leaders reported effective cooperation with police investigating these incidents. They also reported effective cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development in its antidiscrimination training efforts. The Jewish Central Committee organized a public seminar to raise awareness on antidiscrimination legislation.

The Christian-Jewish Council, whose Christian participants include Catholics, evangelicals, and Anglicans, met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. Activities included outreach to other religious groups, such as the Afro-Umbandist,

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and Muslim communities, as well as sponsorship and participation in conferences and meetings related to religious freedom and understanding. There were also several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) actively promoting interfaith understanding.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

U.S. Embassy officials met regularly with the leaders of most religious groups. They also maintained regular contact with a range of government institutions and human rights and religious NGOs engaged in supporting religious freedom, such as the National Institute of Human Rights, the Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination, the Central Jewish Committee, and B'nai B'rith. The embassy continued to include a wide variety of religious leaders in official events.