



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Andorra

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, which receives some privileges not available to other religious groups.

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 180.7 square miles and a population of 78,549 (December 2005 figure). Very few official statistics were available relative to religion; however, traditionally, approximately 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The population consisted largely of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and France, with full citizens representing less than 30 percent of the total. The immigrants were also generally Catholic. It was estimated that, of the Catholic population, approximately half were active church attendees. Other religious groups included Muslims (who primarily were represented among the approximately two thousand North African immigrants and were split between two groups, one more fundamentalist); Hinduism; the New Apostolic Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews.

An estimated one hundred Jews lived in the country. Eight years ago, the Jewish community opened a synagogue and a cultural center. The group suffered no discrimination and was well integrated into the overall society.

Foreign missionaries were active and operated without restriction. For example, the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytized from door to door.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the president of France) is Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicília of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell. The Catholic religious celebration on September 8 of the "Verge de Meritxell" (Virgin of Meritxell) is also a national holiday. The celebration does not negatively affect any religious group.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not mention specifically religious affairs. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups. Registration is not compulsory; however, groups must register or reregister in order to be considered for the support that the Government provides to nongovernmental organizations. To register or reregister, groups must provide the association statutes, the foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to official or board positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization. There were no known reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly expressed some concern as to what treatment groups, whose actions may be considered injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order, should receive. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In spite of negotiations between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque had been built. However, the Muslim community practiced its religion without restriction in places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the

time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Islamic Cultural Center provided approximately fifty students with Arabic lessons. The Government and the Moroccan community had not yet agreed upon a system that would allow children to receive Arabic classes in school outside of the regular school day.

The Government has been responsive to certain needs of the Muslim community. On occasion the Government has made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

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 persons to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In early 2005, under the sponsorship of the foreign minister, a group of persons attended a meeting organized for the first time among Catholics, Buddhist, Hindus, and Muslims which was presided over by the Bishop of Seu d'Urgell Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia.

In 2004, UNESCO opened an interreligious dialogue in the country. The project consisted of various meetings to promote peace and reconciliation among members of different religious groups.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Societal attitudes between and among different religious groups appeared to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice per month to the Anglican community, so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practiced religions other than Catholicism tended to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appeared to be little or no obstacle to their practicing their own religions.

There were no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

According to a report of the European Commission on Andorra, the country had no problems related to discrimination but the society had racial prejudices, an issue that could be exacerbated if the economic situation worsens.

An opinion poll published in 2003 by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "values and traditions of the Andorran Society" indicated that 52 percent saw themselves as "very religious people."

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 and religious freedom. Both the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Madrid, and the Consul General, resident in Barcelona, have met with Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia, the leader of the Catholic community, to discuss religious toleration. The U.S. Consul General specifically discussed with and urged the foreign minister to take a more proactive stance in integrating the Muslim community into society.

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