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Andorra

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

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

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 180 square miles and a population of 85,000. Few official statistics are available on religion; traditionally, approximately 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and France, with Andorran citizens constituting only 37 percent of inhabitants. Generally immigrants are also Catholic.

According to the government, there are 10 religious communities in the principality, which are well integrated in society. They are the Roman Catholic Church; Seventh-day Adventist Church; Jewish community; Anglican Church; Bahai community; Unification Church; New Apostolic Church; other Christian communities, which includes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses; Hindu community; and the Muslim community. The Muslim community is estimated at 1,000 persons.

The 10 religious communities make up the Interfaith Dialogue Group. The Andorran National Commission for UNESCO collaborates with the group, which deals with issues of religious traditions, beliefs, and convictions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The constitution, however, 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." The Catholic Church receives some privileges, although no direct subsidies, not available to other religious groups. One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the president of France) is the Bishop of Urgell, Joan Enric Vives i Sicília, of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell.

There is no law that requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not specifically mention religious organizations. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups. Registration is not compulsory; however, groups must register or reregister to be considered for the support that the government provides to nongovernmental organizations. For example, the government provides support to the Catholic NGO Caritas, the Andorran Migrant Women's Association, and the Andorran Women's Association. To register or reregister, a group must provide its statutes and foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to the board or other official positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization. There were no reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly expressed concern some methods allegedly used by certain religious organizations (brainwashing or physical abuse, for example) might prove injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order. These authorities questioned how they might proceed in such cases, but did not mention a specific instance. The law does not limit such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his or her will."

The government does not assign or grant space for places of worship. Such decisions are handled at the local (parish) government level. In spite of negotiations for some years between the Muslim community and the government, no mosque has been built, apparently due to a lack of unity within the Muslim community. Nevertheless, the estimated 1,000 Muslims have "prayer spaces," and there appear to be no restrictions on the number of these places of worship scattered throughout the country. Instruction in 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 50 students with Arabic lessons. The government was willing to offer Arabic classes, but the Muslim community did not request such assistance. The ombudsman received no complaints from the Muslim community on this issue.

On occasion the government makes public facilities available to religious organizations for religious activities.

The government observes the Catholic religious celebration of the Verge de Meritxell (Virgin of Meritxell) on September 8 as national day, as well as Easter, Whit Sunday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

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Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including of religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Societal attitudes among religious groups appeared to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice a month to the Anglican community so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practice religions other than Catholicism tend to be immigrants, there were few if any obstacles to their practicing their own religions. The Muslim community celebrates iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) every year without restriction and with the participation of Andorran institutions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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