

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution specifies there is no established church and provides for freedom of religion and belief. A concordat with the Holy See, however, designates Catholicism as the official religion and extends special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. Non-Catholic religious groups must register as nongovernmental organizations with the Ministry of Finance and the Directorate General of Customs. They stated this resulted in less advantageous treatment regarding customs duties and visas.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials maintained ties with religious representatives and faith groups to promote religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.3 million (July 2014 estimate). The population is 57 percent Catholic, 23 percent Protestant, including Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals, and 18 percent without religious affiliation, according to a 2014 PEW Research survey. There are also small numbers of Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). According to an evangelical Protestant group, evangelicals represent 30 percent of the population.

Most of the approximately 300 Jews live in Santo Domingo, while a small Jewish community resides in Sosua. There are approximately 140 Muslims, of whom approximately 40 are noncitizens, most of them students. There are a small number of Buddhists and Hindus.

Most Haitian immigrants are Catholic. An unknown number practice Voodoo or other Afro-Caribbean beliefs such as Santeria.

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Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution specifies there is no established church and provides for freedom of religion and belief. A concordat with the Holy See, however, designates Catholicism as the official religion and extends special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. These include the legal recognition of church law, use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, and exclusion from customs duties.

Non-Catholic religious groups must first register as nongovernmental organizations with the attorney general's office and later register with the Ministry of Finance and the Directorate General of Customs to request exclusion from customs duties. Registration with the attorney general's office requires completing a two-step process. First, the organization must provide documentation of a fixed address and the names of seven elected officers. It must have a minimum of 25 members, and pay a fee. Second, the organization must draft and submit statutes and provide copies of government-issued identification documents for the board of directors. Once registered, religious groups may request from the Ministry of Finance exclusion from customs duties.

The law provides for government recognition of marriages performed by all religious groups provided they otherwise comply with related regulations. The constitution states religious marriages have civil effect in terms established by law, subject to the provisions of international treaties. The law authorizes clergy of churches established in the country for at least five years to perform state-recognized marriages on condition they complete training administered by the Central Electoral Board (JCE) and requires churches submit to the JCE a listing of individuals who have received authorization.

The law requires Bible reading in public schools, but the government does not normally enforce this law. Private schools are exempt from this requirement.

Government Practices

Religious groups other than the Catholic Church reported registering as a nongovernmental organization instead of as a religious organization prevented them from enjoying the same status as the Catholic Church. Religious

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organizations other than the Catholic Church had to pay customs duties and then seek refunds on imported food or other goods intended for religious use because of their status as nongovernmental organizations. These religious groups submitted applications for exclusion from customs duties to the Ministry of Finance, but reported it was difficult to obtain a refund for duties already paid. Groups reported they were not able to obtain refunds or had to use round-about methods to obtain them. Additionally, non-Catholic missionaries or religious leaders reportedly could not obtain visas under the same migration category as Catholic religious leaders. A Protestant group reported this difference meant it was more expensive and difficult for non-Catholic groups to bring a missionary to the country than it would be for the Catholic Church.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials maintained ties with religious representatives and faith groups, meeting with officials from the Catholic Church, the United Dominican Council for Evangelicals, which represents the Protestant community, and officials from the Jewish community, including the one rabbi in the country, to promote religious tolerance.