

MEXICO 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to engage in ceremonies and acts of worship. The legislature may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. Some members of indigenous communities reported the local authorities denied them government benefits due to their religious affiliation. The National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED), an autonomous federal agency, promoted religious tolerance through outreach efforts and conducted a survey on discrimination, including discrimination based on religion.

Five Catholic priests or seminarians were killed during the year, all presumed to have been killed by organized criminals, one in the state of Mexico, one in the state of Chihuahua, and three in the state of Guerrero. Two Protestant pastors were also killed during the year, one in Guanajuato State and one in Mexico State. According to the Catholic Multimedia Center, Mexico remained the most dangerous country for priests in Latin America for the sixth consecutive year. Evangelical groups stated religious abuses and discrimination were frequent in small rural communities in the south.

U.S. embassy and consulate representatives met regularly with government officials responsible for religious and indigenous affairs at the state and federal levels. Embassy officers also met with members of religious groups and religiously-affiliated nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 120.3 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the 2010 government census, approximately 83 percent identified as Roman Catholic and 5 percent as evangelical Protestant. Religious groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include other Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Muslims. More than 2 percent of the population reported practicing a religion not otherwise specified, and nearly 5 percent reported not practicing any religion.

Official statistics sometimes differ from membership figures religious groups provide. Approximately 315,000 individuals identified themselves as members of

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in the 2010 census; however, Mormon officials in Mexico state their membership is approximately 1.3 million. There are large Protestant communities in the southern states of Chiapas and Tabasco. In Chiapas, evangelical leaders state nearly half of the state's 2.4 million inhabitants are members of evangelical groups, but less than 5 percent of 2010 census respondents in Chiapas self-identified as evangelical.

According to the 2010 census, the Jewish community numbers approximately 67,500, some 42,000 of whom live in Mexico City and the state of Mexico; there are also small numbers of Jews in Morelos, Nuevo Leon, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz. Nearly half of the country's approximately 4,000 Muslims are concentrated in Mexico City and the state of Mexico. Roughly half of the country's approximately 100,000 Mennonites are concentrated in the state of Chihuahua. Some indigenous persons in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatan adhere to a syncretic religion combining Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to engage in ceremonies and acts of worship. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. It prohibits any form of discrimination, including on the basis of religion. A constitutional amendment that took effect in 2013 specifically prohibits the use of acts of worship for political purposes. The amendment allows for religious services to take place "in public as well as private" places, and added "freedom of ethical convictions" to the constitution, intended to guarantee the freedom to have no religious faith. In 2012, the legislature passed an amendment to the constitution that added the adjective "secular" to the definition of the Republic of Mexico.

Under the law, religious groups are permitted to operate informally without registering with the government. In accord with the constitution, however, religious groups must be registered to negotiate contracts and purchase or rent land, apply for official building permits, receive tax exemptions, and hold religious meetings outside their customary places of worship. To establish a religious association, applicants must certify the church or religious group is occupied with

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observance, practice, propagation, or instruction of religious doctrine or body of religious beliefs; has conducted religious activities in Mexico for at least five years, becoming deeply rooted within the population, and has established domicile in the republic; shows sufficient assets to achieve its purpose; has established statutes; and has met constitutional provisions. Registered associations are entitled to use a unique name; freely organize their internal structures and adopt bylaws or rules governing their authority and operating system, including the training and appointment of their clergy; engage in religious public worship and propagate their doctrine, within applicable regulations; celebrate all acts for the fulfillment of the association's purpose that are lawful and not for the purpose of making a profit; and participate alone or associated with individuals or corporations in the creation, management, maintenance, and operation of private welfare, educational, and health institutions, provided they are not for profit and legal. The law also defines administrative remedies protecting the right to religious freedom.

The law requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or to convert existing buildings into houses of worship. Any religious building constructed after 1992 is the property of the religious group that built it. All religious buildings erected before 1992 are classified as part of the national patrimony, owned by the state, and exempt from taxes.

Under the law, religious associations must notify the government of their intention to hold a religious meeting outside a licensed place of worship. Religious associations may not hold political meetings of any kind.

The federal government coordinates religious affairs through the Secretariat of Government (SEGOB). Within SEGOB, the General Directorate for Religious Associations (DGAR) promotes religious tolerance, conducts conflict mediation, and investigates cases of religious intolerance.

In addition to federal government offices, each of the country's 32 federative entities has administrative offices with responsibility over religious affairs. Chiapas, Guerrero, Yucatan, and Oaxaca States have undersecretaries for religious affairs.

If parties present a dispute based on allegations of religious intolerance, the DGAR will work to mediate a solution. If that mediation fails, the parties may submit the issue to the DGAR for binding arbitration. If the parties do not agree to this procedure, one or the other may seek judicial redress.

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The constitution states public education must be secular, but religious groups are permitted to operate private schools. The law takes no position on primary-level homeschooling for religious reasons; however, to enter a secondary school, one must have attended an accredited primary school. Homeschooling is allowed at the secondary level after completion of schooling at an accredited primary school.

The constitution bars members of the clergy from holding public office; advocating partisan political views; supporting political candidates; or publically opposing the laws or institutions of the state.

Under the law, religious groups may not own or administer radio or television stations. Government permission is required for commercial radio or television to transmit religious programming.

Government Practices

Some members of indigenous communities stated local authorities denied them government benefits and utilities service due to their religious affiliation. Because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. According to the president's annual report, the government worked to address six conflicts motivated by religious intolerance that occurred between September 1, 2013, and August 31, 2014, advancing each case toward mediation and resolution.

According to the Coordination of Christian Organizations of Chiapas, some villages placed signs around the towns banning admittance to Protestants. In one such town in June, a Presbyterian pastor was arbitrarily detained and beaten while visiting family in the village. In December, according to a report by a local NGO, villagers in San Juan Chamula municipality were attacked and beaten and their utility services were cut off after they refused to make financial contributions to the village's Catholic festivals.

According to some NGOs and religious leaders, there were instances where local authorities denied access to public cemeteries to non-Catholic community members. In January the village church council in Comachuen, Michoacan said a Protestant man could not be buried in the village cemetery because his family had not participated in local Catholic events. The municipal government negotiated a

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temporary resolution in which Protestant families would pay a semi-annual contribution that would not be used for Catholic events.

CONAPRED conducted outreach efforts, including training and publications designed to combat discrimination based on religion. CONAPRED also received complaints of discrimination based on religious beliefs and mediated conflicts. CONAPRED was charged with implementing the objectives laid out in the 2014-18 National Program for Equality and Anti-Discrimination, which was released March 30. CONAPRED, along with other federal agencies and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, prepared the most recent National Survey on Discrimination in Mexico in 2010. According to that survey, 78 percent of individuals who identified themselves as Catholic and 68 percent of individuals who identified themselves as a faith other than Catholic said they had never experienced religious discrimination.

The government conducted training events and disseminated information to promote religious tolerance. SEGOB officials conducted 52 workshops in various state institutions and the Federal District with the goal of explaining the legal and regulatory frameworks for religious organizations.

While the DGAR worked closely with state and local officials on criminal investigations of cases involving religious groups, progress was slow. Municipal and state officials commonly mediated disputes among religious groups; however, officials rarely pursued legal remedies against offending local leaders. There were few investigations and prosecutions related to crimes or abuses motivated by an individual's belief or practice.

As of December 5, the DGAR had registered a total of 8,054 religious associations throughout the country. Most were Christian (8,024), followed by Buddhist (13), Jewish (10), New Expressions (4), Hindu (2), Islamic (2), and Krishna (2).

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Five Catholic priests or seminarians were killed during the year, all presumed to have been killed by organized criminals, one in the state of Mexico, one in the state of Chihuahua, and three in the state of Guerrero. After the death of Father Lopez Gorostieta, whose body was found December 25, several Catholic leaders made statements urging the Mexican government to ensure the safety of all of its

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citizens, including priests. The bishop of Ciudad Victoria continued to investigate the November 2013 disappearance of a priest from Jimenez, Tamaulipas. According to the Catholic Multimedia Center, Mexico remained the most dangerous country for priests in Latin America for the sixth consecutive year. In addition, priests reportedly faced extortion attempts, death threats, and intimidation.

At least two Protestant pastors were killed during the year, one in the state of Guanajuato and one in the state of Mexico. Protestant leaders reported they experienced threats and intimidation.

Several evangelical groups stated religious abuses and discrimination were frequent. These incidents mainly occurred in small rural communities in the south. For example in January the Office of the Human Rights Defender in the state of Oaxaca issued a recommendation to the city manager of St. John Ozolotepec in Miahuatlan, Oaxaca, directing the city to ensure the approval of construction permits for the Congregation of the Independent Pentecostal Evangelical Christian Church to complete construction of a temple that was halted by the municipal government in 2011. In the central and southern regions, some communities reportedly viewed evangelical groups as unwelcome outside influences and economic and political threats.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and consulate representatives met regularly with government officials responsible for religious and indigenous affairs at the federal and state levels, raising concerns regarding the deaths of Catholic priests and alleged abuses of evangelical Christians and discussing other religious freedom concerns.

Embassy officers also met with members of religious groups and religiously-affiliated NGOs to discuss perceptions of safety for priests working in Mexico and to assess the status of religious freedom and express support for religious tolerance.