



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Japan

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 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 145,884 square miles and a population of 128 million. It was difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents of different religious groups. While academics estimated that 20 to 30 percent of adults actively practiced a faith, the Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2004 that 213,826,661 citizens claimed a religion. That number, which is nearly twice Japan's population, reflected many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions, particularly Shintoism and Buddhism. Many citizens practiced both Buddhist and Shinto rites. Furthermore, membership statistics kept by the agency were based on self-reports from various religious organizations.

Of citizens who claimed a faith, 51 percent were Shinto, 44 percent were Buddhist and 1 percent was Christian. Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive and most Shinto and Buddhist believers follow both faiths. Approximately 5 percent of the population belonged to other religious groups, including the Unification Church, Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. According to the Japan Muslim Association, there were approximately one-hundred thousand Muslims in the country; an estimated 7 to 10 percent were Japanese citizens. There was also a small Jewish population. Most were foreign born.

As of March 2004, under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law, the government recognized 157 schools of Buddhism. The six major schools of Buddhism are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzaï sects), Nichiren, and Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist schools, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations; Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of eight million, is the largest. The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjashinto and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations had modest followings.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution (law) provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by the cult Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Corporation Law was amended in 1996 to provide the Government with increased authority for oversight of religious groups. The amended law also required greater disclosure of financial assets by religious corporations.

As of December 2004 there were 182,237 groups registered as religious corporations, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The Government does not require religious groups to register or be licensed; however, registered religious corporations receive tax benefits and other advantages. In practice, almost all religious groups register.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Allegations by the Unification Church that the Government was unresponsive to claims that its members were being confined and deprogrammed decreased. Unification Church leadership reported that the number of abductions declined due to the government's increasing willingness to prosecute deprogrammers. However, church leaders continued to express concern over the government's unwillingness to prosecute abductors. According to church officials, police often refused to intercede because abductions often involved family members abducting other family members.

According to a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, members were free to practice their religion without restriction. There was only one alleged forced confinement in January 2005, which was reported to the police. Since 2003 there have been no reported deprogramming cases involving members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

There were no 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 citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There is widespread respect for religious freedom in the society.

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, including the promotion of religious freedom internationally. The U.S. embassy maintains periodic contact with representatives of religious organizations.

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