



Japan

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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. The Government does not require religious groups to report their membership, so it was difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents to different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2005 that membership claims by religious groups totaled 211 million persons. This number, which is nearly twice Japan's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is very common for Japanese to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites.

According to the Agency's annual yearbook, 107 million persons identify themselves as Shinto, 91 million as Buddhist, 3 million as Christian, and 10 million follow "other" religions, including Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. Academics estimate that there are 120 thousand Muslims in Japan, 10 percent of which are Japanese citizens. The Israeli Embassy estimates that there are approximately 2,000 Jews in the country, most of them foreign born.

As of March 2005, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the Government recognized 157 schools of Buddhism. The six major schools of Buddhism are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzai sects), Nichiren, and Narabukkyo. In addition, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, including Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of eight million. The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism had modest followings.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution 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.

As of December 2005, 182,796 out of 223,871 religious groups were certified by the Government as religious organizations with corporate status, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The Government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification; however, certified religious organizations receive tax benefits. More than 82 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2005.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Juridical Persons Law was amended in 1996 to provide the Government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The amended law requires certified religious organizations to disclose their assets to the government and empowers the Government to

investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious organization's for-profit activities if they violate these regulations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no reports of restrictions on religious freedom.

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 citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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

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.

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