



## Japan

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

The Ministry of Justice received 22 complaints of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Twenty of these cases were found to be valid, and the Ministry provided legal assistance to the victims.

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 145,884 square miles and a population of 128 million. Since the Government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it was difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents to different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2006 that membership claims by religious groups totaled 209 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, 89 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 115,000 to 125,000 Muslims in Japan, of which 10 percent are Japanese citizens. The Israeli Embassy estimates that there are approximately 2,000 Jews in the country, most of them foreign born.

As of December 2006, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the Government recognized 154 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 8 million "households." The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have modest followings.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors

As of December 2006, 182,468 out of 223,970 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 81 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2006.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Juridical Persons Law was amended 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.

During the reporting period, courts ruled on several lawsuits filed against the Unification Church alleging extortion, kidnapping, or fraud. Courts ruled in favor of the Church in two cases and against the Church in another case.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, but there were isolated allegations of government discrimination on the basis of religion.

According to representatives from the Unification Church, a member of their congregation was abducted by his family and held in captivity for more than 12 years in an attempt to "deprogram" him. Four months after his escape, police had not opened an investigation into the case.

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**

The Ministry of Justice received 22 complaints of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the calendar year 2007. Twenty of these cases were found to be valid, and the Ministry provided legal assistance to the victims.

According to representatives of the Unification Church, approximately 10 to 20 practitioners were forcibly "deprogrammed" by concerned family members during the reporting period, and in most cases, the believers "quickly gave up their faith."

### **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.

Released on September 19, 2008

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