



Japan

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

October 26, 2009

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 reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuse of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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 127.6 million. Since the Government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it is difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents of 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 the country'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. There are an estimated 100,000 Muslims in Japan, of whom an estimated 10 percent are Japanese citizens. The Israeli Embassy estimates that there are approximately 2,000 Jews, most of them foreign-born. Although anti-Semitic remarks and/or conspiracy theories sometime appear in the media, there are no reports of harassment or violence against either individuals or the Jewish community.

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 Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

As noted, 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country. A Jewish American who was detained in a Chiba Prefecture prison at the end of the reporting period had trouble obtaining kosher meals. A local Jewish organization offered to provide the meals to the prison, but prison officials claimed they could not accept food prepared by outside groups.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Unification Church reports that on February 10, 2008 an adult member of the Church who had been held against his will by his family members for over 12 years was released and went to Unification Church headquarters. The Unification Church alleges no one has yet been charged and an investigation has not been conducted as of the end of the reporting period.

In November 2008, a Roman Catholic service in Nagasaki beatifying 188 seventeenth-century Japanese martyrs was well attended by leaders of several religious groups and received positive coverage in the mainstream press.

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.