



Portugal

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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

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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.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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 35,672 square miles and a population of 10.6 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage states that it does not actively participate in church activities. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent include various Protestant denominations (including 250,000 evangelicals) and non-Christian religious groups (Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians, among others). In addition, many of the estimated 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, more than half of whom are from the Ukraine, are Eastern Orthodox.

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.

The Government is secular. Other than the Constitution, the two most important documents relating to religious freedom are the 2001 Religious Freedom Act and the 1940 Concordat with the Holy See.

The 2001 Religious Freedom Act created a legislative framework for religious groups established in the country for at least 30 years or those recognized internationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religious groups with benefits previously reserved only for the Catholic Church: full tax-exempt status, legal recognition of marriage and other rites, chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals, and respect for traditional holidays. It allows each religion to negotiate its own concordat-style agreement with the Government, although it does not ensure the acceptance of any such agreements.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the terms of the 1940 concordat as amended in 2004 to comply with the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. The concordat recognizes the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. It also allows the Catholic Church to receive a percentage of the income tax that citizens can allocate to various institutions in their annual tax returns. In addition, chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Catholics only.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays.

Public secondary school curricula include an optional course called "Religion and Morals," which functions as a survey of world religious groups and is taught by laypersons. It can be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion, in which case the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for this course. Other religious groups can set up such a course if they have ten or more children of that religion in the particular school. Representatives from each religious group have the right to approve the course's respective instructors.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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 Church of Scientology, although recognized as a religious association since 1986 and as a religion since November 2007, does not benefit from the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, since it has not been established in the country for 30 years or recognized internationally for 60 years, as required under the law. Scientology leaders were concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act might have a negative effect on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the period covered by this report.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On April 22, 2008, Lisbon Mayor Antonio Costa presided over a ceremony in Lisbon's main square to pay tribute to the **thousands of Jews killed by angry mobs in 1506 during what is known as the Easter Massacre**. A memorial marker was placed on the site, together with a Christian monument and a wall panel remembering the 3-day killing spree. The event was attended by Lisbon's Cardinal Patriarch, parliamentarians, municipal representatives, members of other religious groups, president of the Commission for Religious Freedom Mario Soares, president of the Aristides de Sousa Mendes Foundation Maria Barroso, many Jewish community members, and the media. During the ceremony Lisbon city council officials dedicated a mural on the square proclaiming Lisbon the "City of Tolerance."

On February 19, 2008, Parliament Speaker Jaime Gama presided at the official launch of the Aristides de Sousa Mendes Virtual Museum, a website chronicling the life and work of the Portuguese consul general in Bordeaux, France, who in defiance of his government issued visas enabling approximately 30,000 Jews to escape the Nazis during World War II. With this tribute the country helped restore the reputation of a diplomat who was fired in disgrace by his neutral government due to fears of angering Nazi Germany.

On January 28, 2008, President Cavaco Silva, together with representatives of various religions and politicians, attended a Holocaust remembrance service at the Lisbon synagogue. He unveiled a memorial plaque, was presented with a copy of the Torah, and delivered remarks underscoring the importance of tolerance.

In November 2007 the Government recognized Scientology as a religion.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

On September 25, 2007, approximately 20 tombstones in Lisbon's Jewish cemetery were vandalized. Police arrested two persons, who were later released with restrictions on their movement and were awaiting trial at the end of the reporting period. Government ministers, parliamentarians, and Muslim, Christian, and Baha'i religious leaders gathered in Lisbon on October 6, 2007, to demonstrate solidarity with the Jewish community. The speakers denounced the vandalism, and the Minister of the Interior declared, "Today, we are all Jews." Parliament approved resolutions condemning the incident and

underscoring that the Constitution guarantees full rights and freedoms to Jews.

On September 19, 2007, police arrested 36 neo-Nazis active in the right-wing Hammerskin Nation organization on charges of threats, harassment, physical attacks, kidnapping, illegal possession of weapons, and incitement to crime through the circulation of racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic messages.

The Government continued to promote interfaith understanding. Five days a week the state television channel (Radiotelevisao Portuguesa 2) broadcasts a 30-minute program consisting of various segments written and produced by different religious communities. The Government pays for the segments, and professional production companies are contracted to produce the segments. Religious communities send delegates to a special television commission, which determines the scheduling of segments. The television commission has operated on the general rule that religious communities are eligible for the program if established for at least 30 years in Portugal or at least 60 years in their country of origin.

A government-sponsored Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue promotes multicultural and multireligious dialogue between the Government and society. Among its objectives are fostering tolerance for religious diversity, promotion of interreligious studies, and participation in national and international religious events. The group is led by a government-appointed chairman and consists primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area.

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. In addition, U.S. embassy representatives continued contacts with leaders of the country's religious groups, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities.

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