

# **URUGUAY 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and laws provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination based on religion. Church and state are separate. The government granted broadcast time on national media networks for an International Holocaust Remembrance Day message.

Anti-Semitic graffiti and online commentary surged briefly during the summer conflict in Gaza. The senate and the Ministry of Education and Culture's Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination condemned such acts and Jewish leaders reported effective cooperation with the government.

U.S. embassy officials met with the government and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. During these meetings, government officials and religious and civil society leaders stated the government respects religious freedom and that society exhibits a high degree of religious tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 3.3 million (July 2014 estimate). National Institute of Statistics data on religious preference from 2008, the most recent year available, indicate approximately 45 percent of the population self-identifies as Roman Catholic, and approximately 10 percent as non-Catholic Christian. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Afro-Umbandists (who blend elements of Roman Catholicism with animism and African and indigenous beliefs), Jews, Buddhists, members of the Unification Church, and Muslims (300-400 members). Approximately 28 percent of the population indicates a belief in God but no specific religious affiliation. There is no significant correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity or political or socio-economic status.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

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The constitution and laws provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination based on religion. The constitution states that “all religious groups are free in Uruguay.” There is strict separation of church and state. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of religious minority groups.

Religious groups are entitled to property tax exemptions for their houses of worship. To receive such exemptions, a religious group must register with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) as a nonprofit entity and present draft organizing statutes. The ministry examines the legal entity and grants authorization for the religious group to receive tax exemption. If approved, the group may request a property tax exemption from the taxing authority, usually the municipal government.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools are closed on major Christian holidays. Students belonging to minority religious groups may miss school on their religious holidays without penalty.

### **Government Practices**

The Central Jewish Committee reported that the official education curriculum continued to lack coverage of the Holocaust. In January the government granted national media networks time to broadcast a special message commemorating International Holocaust Remembrance Day and congress paid homage during a special session. The government had observer status at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

The National Institute of Human Rights, an autonomous branch of congress, and the MEC’s Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination enforced government compliance with the antidiscrimination laws. Representatives from religious and civil society groups were active participants in the commission. In May the commission launched a campaign called Todos Juntos Contra la Discriminacion (All Together against Discrimination) which encouraged all citizens to submit for public display artistic creations promoting religious tolerance, inclusion, and solidarity in society.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Jewish community authorities reported an increase in anti-Semitic acts in conjunction with the Gaza conflict. Anti-Semitic incidents occurred around the

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country, including graffiti on public walls, buses, and dumpsters and virulent expressions against the Jewish community and Israel on the internet. In response, the senate unanimously passed a declaration condemning the acts and calling for tolerance, and the commission issued a similar statement. Jewish leaders reported effective cooperation with police investigating these incidents.

The Christian-Jewish Council, whose Christian participants include Catholics, evangelicals, and Anglicans, met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. Activities included outreach to other religious groups, such as the Afro-Umbandist, and Muslim communities, as well as sponsorship of and participation in conferences and meetings related to religious freedom and understanding. In September government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and religious leaders representing a wide array of faiths held an interreligious dialogue to promote interfaith understanding and respect for distinct religious values.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

U.S. embassy officials maintained regular contact with a range of government institutions, as well as human rights and religious NGOs engaged in supporting religious freedom, such as the National Institute of Human Rights; the Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination; and the Central Jewish Committee. They met with the leaders of religious groups to elicit their perspective on religious tolerance in the country. Government officials, religious leaders, and civil society activists stated the government respects religious freedom and society exhibits a high degree of religious tolerance.